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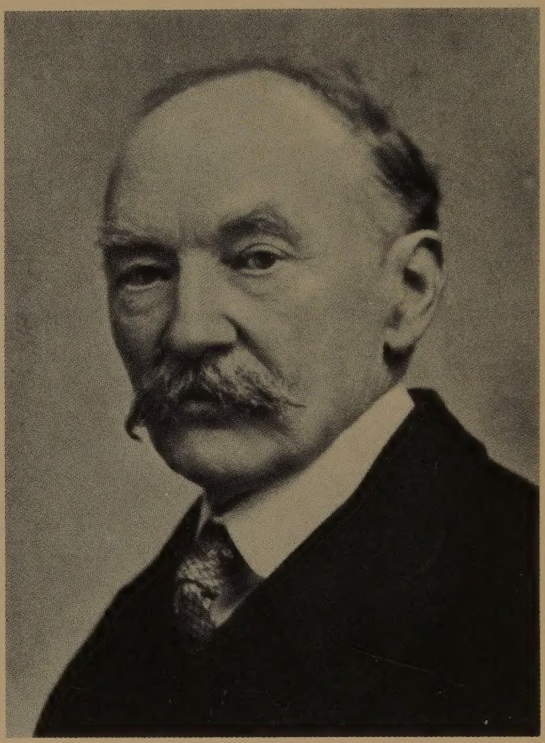
THOMAS HARDY

And his Philosophy



THOMAS HARDY

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THOMAS HARDY

And his Philosophy

BY
PATRICK BRAYBROOKE
F.R.S.L.

NEW YORK / RUSSELL & RUSSELL

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1928
REISSUED, 1969, BY RUSSELL & RUSSELL
DIVISION OF ATHENEUM PUBLISHERS, INC.
L. C. CATALOG CARD NO: 68-25069
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEDICATION

TO IDA COOPER,

a modern woman who still remains a woman.

Preface

In this book about Mr. Hardy I have endeavoured to consider him both as a prose writer and a poet. From these two considerations I have attempted to define what his philosophy may be. It is certainly, I think, melancholy. It may even be morbid.

Whether it is really a true philosophy of life will ultimately depend upon what is demanded of life. In any case, Mr. Hardy's philosophy is not really satisfying, for the quite good reason that philosophy is never satisfying. If it was, there would be an end of philosophy, and we should all die of boredom.

Patrick Braybrooke.

York House, Tetbury,
Gloucestershire,
Autumn, 1927.

Contents

PART ONE

The Writer of Prose

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	An Early Book	13
II	"The Return of the Native"	24
III	"The Mayor of Casterbridge"	36
IV	"Tess"	46
V	One or Two "Ironies"	63
VI	Hardy and a Temperament	76
VII	A Tragic Man	84

PART II

The Writer of Verse

I	"The Dynasts" (Part One)	99
II	"The Dynasts" (Part Two)	111
III	"The Dynasts" (Part Three)	124
IV	Wessex and Anywhere	133
V	Satires and Miscellaneous Verses ..	142

PART III

A Summing Up

I	The Philosopher	155
II	His Place in Literature	162

PART I
THE WRITER OF PROSE

Thomas Hardy and his Philosophy

CHAPTER ONE

AN EARLY BOOK

THERE is something to be said for the assertion that in an early book a writer is quite often more himself than in any subsequent work. This has nothing whatever to do with the evident fact that in most cases later books have superior literary qualities to those found in earlier volumes. For in an early book a writer is more or less free from the prejudices which later may determine somewhat his style and his philosophy. He has not seen a certain type of book unfavourably received, nor on the other hand has he witnessed the favourable reception of his work when he is in a certain mood. An early book has the advantage that the writer of it can create without having to think too much about the probable fate of his creation. In other words, I feel that an early book of an author is quite frequently characterised by a spontaneity that is lacking in later, and probably better, works. It is then a matter of interest and some importance that an attempted study of a very great writer should spend its first chapter in an attempt to estimate the worth and point of view of an early book of such an author. It is, then, with this in view that I write of Mr. Hardy's " A Pair of Blue Eyes " in this opening chapter.

. . . . . .

A note of haunting sadness runs through the whole of this early book of Hardy's. The young writer is overwhelmed by the sorrow of life, the sky is obscured by heavy clouds. But at present Hardy is not melancholy and angry, he is only melancholy. Anger and melancholy come later, when a writer knows that he cannot overcome melancholy, when he knows that however brilliant his pen, however sustained his efforts, he cannot do much to make life brighter. So a feeling of anger mingles with his melancholy, with a result that pessimism creeps in. But this is to anticipate something of the later works of Hardy. At present it is perhaps fair to say that the essence of his outlook is sad.

In the opening lines of " A Pair of Blue Eyes " Hardy writes : " Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface."

In other words, we are to be introduced to a Hardy heroine whose judgment is likely to be faulty being largely determined by her emotions. Consequently we are prepared for the unpleasing spectacle of a girl who is likely to find the course of her life difficult and full of contradictories, violent actions and disheartening reactions. Hardy is creating an unstable being, a being blown here and there, a prey to her own complicated nature.

And again, a few lines later, Elfride Swancourt is the kind of girl most likely to be trapped by the world, being for the most part unworldly.

" She had lived all her life in retirement." And it must be added Hardy seems to imply that the only safe way of her living her life would have been to live the whole of it in retirement. But this is not to be. A simple incident maps out her existence in quite other channels. The incident seems so trivial, but to Hardy it is the trivial which leads

to such dreadful complications. He puts it quite plainly. We are to have the sadness and pleasure of knowing Elfride Swancourt at a turning point in her life when, from henceforth, she will have no more of the existence carried out in retirement.

> "The point in Elfride Swancourt's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in was one winter afternoon when she found herself standing, in the character of hostess, face to face with a man she had never seen before—moreover, looking at him with a Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on a mortal."

That this is a terrifying ordeal to the young girl is quite evident by the brilliant dialogue that Hardy creates when she is talking to her father about the terror she feels at having to entertain a strange man. The immaturity of Elfride seems to be almost exaggerated.

But perhaps we are prone to forget that we live in different days; the early books of Hardy are as remote from this century as the late books of Dean Swift.

> "'Must he have dinner?'
>
> "'Too heavy for a tired man at the end of a tedious journey.'
>
> "'Tea, then?'
>
> "'Not substantial enough.'
>
> "'High tea, then? There is cold fowl, rabbit-pie, some pasties, and things of that kind.'
>
> "'Yes, high tea.'
>
> "'Must I pour out his tea, papa?'
>
> "'Of course, you are mistress of the house.'"

Of course this is delightful. Hardy is kind; he wants to make us smile before he makes us weep. For we weep better when we have smiled; the tears are not so bitter; they have a look back; we have smiled. If we now weep unrestrainedly, we cannot complain, for smiles come at the beginning, but the end of life is tears.

If this early book of Hardy's is mainly a study of a girl with a weak nature and a pliable heart; it is no less occupied with many charming pen pictures of an English vicar. The relationship between Mr. Swancourt and his parishioners is brought out with great care. Though deafness is a frightful catastrophe, it is impossible not to smile at the little passage of words about their different forms of deafness when Mr. Swancourt has a conversation with one of his parishioners. It is the kind of conversation that takes place in every English village every time the vicar meets and discusses diseases with a distressed fellow sufferer.

> "'Now, my deafness,' said Mr. Swancourt, impressively, 'is a dead silence; but William Worm's is that of people frying fish in his head. Very remarkable isn't it?'
>
> "'I can hear the frying pan a fizzing as naterel as life, said Worm, corroboratively."

There is in this exquisite passage no small indication of the coming genius for the creation of rural figures, simple yet profound beings, for which Hardy is so rightly distinguished.

There is also the admirable restraint of the careful artist. It is so easy to caricature one of England's "peasants," to make him speak instead of letting him speak as he would were he to take sudden and real life outside the boundary enclosed by two book covers. Hardy avoids the tendency of exaggeration; the result is that the speech of the yokel is the speech of a typical yokel.

Not less skilful is the speech of the vicar, but it is easier not to caricature a clergyman than a yokel. Control, at any rate in this early book, is one of the characteristics of its author.

Hardy has one or two very penetrating remarks to make about the gloom with which we surround ourselves at death, as if death was not gloomy enough in itself. Death is the most gloomy thing in the world, the most direct thrust at all our human ambitions, the one thing that proves we are bought with a horrid price. We are in the atmosphere of the churchyard when Hardy pens this common sense point of view.

> " A delightful place to be buried in, postulating that delight can accompany a man to his tomb under any circumstances. There was nothing horrible in this churchyard."

Hardy then goes on to lament that it is we who invest death with artificial gloom.

> " . . . . in the shape of tight mounds bonded with sticks, which shout imprisonment in the ears rather than whisper rest ; or trim garden flowers which only raise images of people in new black crape and white handkerchiefs coming to tend them ; or wheel marks which remind us of hearses and mourning coaches ; or cypress bushes which make a parade of sorrow ; or coffin boards and bones lying behind trees, showing that we are only leaseholders of our graves."

But perhaps Hardy is a little severe. The poor people who come in their black crape, with their trim white hand-

kerchiefs, none look more pathetic. We catch a glimpse of them as we rush past a cemetery in an express train. On a Sunday afternoon we pass them on their way to the cemetery —that newly made widow, her desperate white face, that bent old man, his look of waiting, the desire only for his own death. Poor dead bodies, we can only show how much we miss you by our silly little flowers, our tiny wet white handkerchiefs, our pathetic black. It is the last that we can do, we must try and forget that the body is turning to dust, that the spirit, if there is one, has gone and no contact with it seems to remain or even be ever promised again.

The plot of " A Pair of Blue Eyes " is certainly a curious one. It implies that love is dreadfully blind, and so blind that it cannot even observe class distinction. Thus, Elfride Swancourt becomes engaged to the young man who comes down to see about repairs to her father's church. But—and here is a Hardy tragedy—she does not know that this most desirable youth has a father who is one of the most humble parishioners in the parish.

Hardy is at this stage beginning to really enjoy the horrid complexities that beset Elfride's path. For though her father is quite an excellent Christian, he is like most excellent Christians, only too conscious of class, only too desirous that his daughter shall marry quite suitably and quite as befits the daughter of an English vicar. Two lines, and we are right into the dilemma, the conflict between love and tradition.

> " My father is John Smith, Lord Luxellian's master mason, who lives under the park wall by the river ! "

It is all so inscrutable, this playing about with our sacred

passions and emotions. Why this love for the one man out of the millions who live who cannot be received on an equality with her father ? Already Hardy is troubled with the seeming mischievous jokes that are flung at us, so that they become vile tyrannies.

For what Hardy seems to be concerned with at this particular period of his work is the almost senseless way that we give our emotions, outpour our passions, only to find that they have been expended in directions which can only end in worry and great disappointment.

For Elfride has not only the difficulty of her own nature to deal with ; she is the child of an inexorable tradition. A tradition, good or bad it may be, but a tradition that will exist so long as England exists. That is the tradition the impossibility of marriage between one class and another. Even if John Smith was the most desirable of all men ; even, apparently, the most likely to be harmonious to Elfride, there is an insurmountable barrier. Alas, his father is but a master mason. If only his father had been a peer, of however doubtful origins, it would not in the least matter.

With cunning diagnosis Hardy shows how terribly upset Mr. Swancourt is at the humble parentage of John Smith. We cannot blame him ; it is not snobbery, but hard, cold tradition. And the clergy are intensely traditional, making it convenient to forget that their Founder was a Carpenter.

An extensive quotation gives the vicar's point of view, and it is characterised by a great deal of common sense.

> " We must look at what he is, not what an improbable degree of success in his profession may make him. The case is this : the son of a working man in my parish who may or may not be able to buy me up—a youth who has not yet advanced so far into life as to have any income of

his own deserving the name, and therefore of his father's degree as regards station—wants to be engaged to you."

The vicar then states quite frankly the terribly distressing social problem. I think that Hardy is chuckling a little maliciously at the way love has to capitulate to what the world (in this case a small village) thinks.

"His family are living in precisely the same spot in England as yours, so throughout this country—which is the world to us—you would always be known as the wife of Jack Smith the mason's son, and not under any circumstances as the wife of a London professional man."

There is no escape from this position. It is inevitable, it is perhaps almost a judgment on our social laws which relegate people into the tightest watertight compartments.

However, Elfride has wit enough to reply to the arguments but the reply is not too convincing.

"'Professional men in London,' Elfride argued, 'don't know anything about their clerks' fathers and mothers. They have assistants who come to their offices and shops for years and hardly even know where they live.'"

Hardy seems to forget that had Elfride migrated to London with John Smith, it would not have mattered a bit that she had married the son of a master mason. In our small communities our social laws are the most drastic.

Already, then, though a little shadowy, tragedy, sorrow, disillusion are creeping into Hardy's outlook. The faint ripple will grow into a violent storm.

When Elfride runs away to London with John Smith. Hardy is writing a novel which, in the popular sense, is really " ordinary." What I mean is that there is no very marked Hardy characteristic about this part of his work, It is almost immature in its frankness and straightforward description. A few lines concerning this highly silly, yet romantic episode, will I hope show my criticisms here not to be unfair or supercilious.

Here is the start to the dash to London.

" ' Passengers for the eleven five up train take their seats !' said a guard's voice on the platform.

" ' Will you go, Elfride ? '

" ' I will.'

" In three minutes the train had moved off, bearing away with it Stephen and Elfride."

Possibly there is something almost too simple about all this. Or is it that Hardy wishes to show clearly how the romantic and the prosaic blend ?

The end to this tragic " excursion " is just as prosaic and straightforward, and Hardy is the mere chronicler of the end of a miserable story ; but it might have been much more miserable had it ended as the two lovers meant it to end when they embarked on the trip.

" They ran down the staircase—Elfride first—to the booking office, and into a carriage with an official standing beside the door. ' Show your tickets, please.' They are locked in—men about the platform accelerate their velocities till they fly up and down like shuttles in a loom—a whistle—the waving of a flag—a human cry—a steam groan—and away they go to Plymouth again."

It is as well that the episode ends as it does, for it is not very much later, when a new interest arrives, that Elfride begins to forget the master mason's son. It is a little comment, and again I think that Hardy is chuckling a little grimly.

> " And that evening she went to bed for the first time without thinking of Stephen at all."

Let us take one or two glimpses more at this rather terrible book, that terrible grimness which is the pet theme of so many great minds, the great writers, the great painters, the great philosophers.

> " Knight spoke to a bystander. ' What has Mr. Swancourt to do with that funeral ?'
>
> " ' He is the lady's father,' said the bystander.
>
> " ' What lady's father ?' said Knight, in a voice so hollow that the man stared at him.
>
> " ' The father of the lady in the coffin. She died in London, you know, and has been brought here by this train. She is to be taken home to-night and buried to-morrow.' "

So bitter is the end, those blue eyes closed in death, the miserable men without hope, without faith, left to drag out the remaining years with the slender shadow of a memory. It is Thomas Hardy in despair, foreboding and uncompromising.

One last picture and still a picture of deep gloom.

> " Knight and Stephen had advanced to where they once stood beside Elfride on the day all three had met there

before she had herself gone down into silence like her ancestors and shut her bright blue eyes for ever. Not until then did they see the kneeling figure in the dim light. Knight instantly recognized the mourner as Lord Luxellian, the bereaved husband of Elfride."

Those who will say that the body matters not, let them say, if it gives them and others any comfort. But they will not, if they are human, be surprised that with Hardy we weep and weep bitterly at the awful silence and the absolute finality of the coffin. Perhaps when the tears have passed away it may seem that the coffin is but the receptacle of fast decaying flesh and fast turning to dust.

At present Hardy leaves us with the dust and we cannot be blamed if we can see no further than his art takes us.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER TWO

"THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE"

THERE is a certain amount of parallelism between "The Return of the Native" and "A Pair of Blue Eyes." In the former book we are once more the spectators of Hardy creating and developing a curious feminine character—someone with whom Life plays a hard game, someone whose path is sombre and difficult. Hardy in this book is still rather gloomy. But this is to anticipate, for it is my wish in this book to attempt to analyse the essence of Hardy in each particular book of his, without necessarily seeking for a logical development of his general outlook. That will perhaps be rightly considered in the third part of this volume. At present it will be well to consider each book, as far as possible, as an entity.

. . . . . .

It is not very far on in "The Return of the Native" before we are introduced to a charming Hardy situation. One of those grotesque incidents that prove the originator of them to be possessed of the accumulated talents which, taken as a sum, become genius. It is no less than a reddleman carrying at the back of his rough van a young woman. There is some delicious conversation between this reddleman and a passer-by. There is a combination of eager questionings and sullen replies. The reddleman does not converse with strangers too genially.

" Possibly these two might not have spoken again till their parting, had it not been for the reddleman's visits to his van. When he returned from his fifth time of looking in the old man said, ' You have something inside there besides your load ?'

" ' Yes.'

" ' Somebody who wants looking after ?'

" ' Yes.'

" ' You have a child there, my man ?'

" ' No, sir, I have a woman.'

" ' The deuce you have. Why did she cry out ?'

" ' Oh, she has fallen asleep, and not being used to travelling, she's uneasy and keeps dreaming.' "

There is in this scene something that throws us right back to England of many years ago. There is something quite unsophisticated about the incident. Hardy is, for the moment, in an almost playful mood ; he seems to imply that you never really know what strange adventure may be met with, even in the prosaic excitement of meeting a van on a lonely highway. Who would expect to find a young woman in such a curious predicament ? We, who perhaps travel far and wide, have never been so blessed by fortune.

Not very much later, Hardy is again in a playful mood. The humour of the yokel is much more nimble than might be expected. His quaint mixture of jocularity and chagrin are magnetic to those who have been fortunate enough to be witnesses of it. Hardy reproduces this " mixed " humour with quiet skill.

" ' What be ye quaking for, Christian ?' said the turf-cutter, kindly.'

" ' I'm the man.'

" ' What man ? '

" ' The man no woman will marry.' "

The unfortunate man who is spurned by all women explains the sad fortunes he received at his last emphatic rejection. Again Hardy is continuing a mood of half laughing banter.

> " ' Well, and what did the last one say to ye ? Nothing that can't be got over, perhaps, after all ?'
>
> " ' Get out of my sight, you slack, twisted, slim looking fool,' was the woman's words to me."

The queer superstition of the yokels, and yet their unrealised affinity with Science, makes itself felt in the conversation about the moon. Hardy seems to be remarkably penetrating in his dissection of the country native.

> " ' Yes, ' no moon, no man.' 'Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that's born at new moon. A bad job for thee, Christian, that you should have showed your nose then of all days in the month.' "

It is possibly a little sad that we have so little comparatively of this kind of intimate study of rather primitive country people. But Hardy is not writing a study of these simple people, he is writing about a complex kind of woman, and it is not long before the black clouds come racing up, the shrill sound of the tearing wind of misfortune is borne to our ears, the wild efforts of evil come nearer and nearer, ever ready to pounce and utterly destroy.

Eustacia is a Hardy heroine who is blown hither and thither by the unscrupulous promptings of Love. She loves a man, yet an intuition tells her that he is not to be trusted. Yet she loves on. Hardy takes a savage delight

in suggesting that we are really but pawns, quite unable to obey rational instincts, swayed by vague and treacherous emotions. Eustacia has reason, but it cannot make her lead her life in a rational manner. A small scene of a good-bye between Eustacia and her lover indicates the unfortunate indeterminateness which pervades her being. Hardy at this stage does not give much hope for the doctrine of Free Will.

" ' Perhaps I may kiss your hand ?'
" ' No, you may not.'
" ' Then I may shake your hand ?'
" ' No.'
" ' Then I wish you good night without caring for either. Goodbye, goodbye.' "
" She returned no answer, and with the bow of a dancing master he vanished on the other side of the pool as he had come."

But—and here is a Hardy dilemma—Eustacia in this cold fashion is not her true self. She is, to put it quite crudely, in a terrible muddle.

" Eustacia sighed, it was no fragile maiden sigh, but a sigh which shook her like a shiver. Whenever a flash of reason darted like an electric light upon her lover, as it sometimes would—and showed his imperfections—she shivered thus."

Then it is that yet again Hardy shows that we cannot really help ourselves. Or, rather, emotions have more sway than reason, yet, perverse nature, emotions lead

so far astray. We know in a degree that we are being led down a blind alley, yet our procedure down it is as inevitable as though a gigantic force propelled us. Reason, at any rate according to Hardy in this particular situation, cannot keep Eustacia from travelling along a path that would not be travelled along if her reason could conquer her emotions.

> "But it was over in a second, and she loved on. She knew that he trifled with her; but she loved on."

A cold inevitability marks this passage. Love for Hardy is the supreme end of all things in the sense that any other consideration must be discarded so that its greedy appetite be satiated. Love rushes through Eustacia, it encounters reason, wrestles with and in almost a moment has passed on, a cold and callous conqueror. But this girl is rather an ineffectual person. Hardy writes a very lengthy dissertation about her, and certain portions of it need to be quoted. She has certain powers, but she is not the type of person to let these powers bring about much difference in the world.

> "She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess; that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government."

Further than this, Hardy makes Eustacia one of those unfortunate people who cannot in any way place their ideas in any kind of logical order. They are arranged in a

kind of chaotic mass, so that their value is practically nil to their possessor. Hardy puts this inharmonious assortment of ideas quite frankly.

> " Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas from old time and new. There was no middle distance in her perspective ; romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon."

A kind of superficial looking back to life as a progress of rather harmless but not helpful trivialities. Her life had quite evidently been no real school.

Yet she is perhaps not so much a type as a universal. For Hardy never leaves it in the least obscure that love to a woman " is her whole existence." But this love desire nearly always seems to bring with it sorrow and pain. Why our most delicious and meritorious emotion should lead to dissatisfaction is a problem to which there appears to be no answer in earth, and possibly not even in Heaven !

> " To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days."

It possibly explains Eustacia's vacillations a little when Hardy explains that to a limited extent her love is impersonal, or, rather, not firmly fixed on a human person. Perhaps love in its most perfect sense is too exquisite to find a haven in so limited a thing as a human being. Yet humanity can only really satisfy love. It is a perplexing dilemma.

"And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover."

There is a very terrible curse which assails quite a number of Hardy's characters. It is that fatal feeling that all is transitory, that love will appear only to sink; that feeling which begins to slowly but surely breed a doctrine of despair. And not only that, something far more dangerous—a rather vague and indefinable grudge against that Force we call Providence. It is, as Hardy writes so exquisitely, a quarrel with our own thoughts, a quarrel with things intangible and yet far more real than many tangible concrete commodities.

"She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny, through whose interference she dimly fancied it arose that love alighted only on gliding youth."

Thus this curious feeling of resentment leads to an expectancy of mishaps.

"That any love she might win would sink simultaneously with the sand in the glass."

But Eustacia is not so convinced of the spite of a Higher Power that she can no longer pray. Hardy is pessimistic, but not without some very slender hope.

"Her prayer was always spontaneous, and often ran thus: O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness; send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die."

Thus Hardy leads us up to the awful position that Eustacia feels nothing is really worth the doing. There is perhaps nothing more terrible, for it may be that with such an outlook the only thing really worth while is suicide.

> " And so we see our Eustacia—for at times she was not altogether unlovable—arriving at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worth while."

. . . . . .

There is a possible criticism that Hardy makes some of his country characters almost too servile when they are in the presence of their superiors. In other words, he may be said to create people who are almost of the Continental peasant type. I hope that a short quotation may show this. As a personal opinion I believe that it is untrue and uncritical to contend that Hardy exaggerates the servility of any of his characters.

> " She seemed to feel, after a bare look at Diggory Venn, that the man had come on a strange errand, and that he was not so mean as she had thought him ; for her close approach did not cause him to writhe uneasily, or shift his feet, or show any of those little signs which escape an ingenuous rustic at the advent of the uncommon in womankind."

After all, many who are most superior and intellectual beings have been known to shake at the approach of a woman ; in fact, we should all be sorry to have never had the Divine shaking.

It so happened that a German philosopher once had the supreme genius of being both a pessimist and a person of

sound common sense. He enunciated as his life teaching something which rather crudely expressed itself in the fact that what we want is no longer wanted when we get it. It would be out of the question here to make any attempt to "moralise" concerning such a doctrine. Hardy, in the book I am discussing in this chapter, certainly makes some such suggestion, which gives him a relative affinity to the said German philosopher. The unpleasant position that Eustacia has arrived at is that when she can have her lover she is no longer quite certain that she wants him. It is the same with so many things that come to mortals. We sigh for the stars only to find that we want them because they are impossible of attainment.

> "What curious feeling was this coming over her? Was it really possible that her interest in Wildeve had been so entirely the result of antagonism that the glory and the dream departed from the man with the first sound that he was no longer coveted by her rival."

And yet, with all the complexity of her nature, Eustacia is annoyed with herself that any waning of affection for her lover should even be suggested. Again and again Hardy demonstrates the vacillations, the contradictories, that make Eustacia's mind but an inharmonious receptacle of conflicts.

> "She was immediately angry at having betrayed even to herself the possible evanescence of her passion for him."

It is when Eustacia wishes to see the man from Paris that we get some of the Hardy whimsicality at its very best. The bargain that she makes to take someone else's place in the play introduces one of those episodes that are the more sweet, in that they are so rare.

Eustacia asks the performer what she must give him so that she can take his place. With great lack of imagination she thinks that a certain money will effect the transposition. The answer is that a certain sum is not enough. Must it then be a more princely sum ? Oh, foolish woman ! As if money can buy something from a boy who worships your very shadow, be it ever so slender. No, she must give something so sweet, so delicious. And yet but the right to hold a woman's hand.

" ' Now what must I give you to agree to this ? Half-a-crown ? '

" The youth shook his head.

" ' Five shillings ? '

" He shook his head again. ' Money won't do it,' he said, brushing the iron head of the fire-dog with the hollow of his hand.

" ' What will, then, Charley ? ' said Eustacia, in a disappointed tone."

It is at this point that there is the delightful answer. Something that is more beautiful than romance—a hopeless worship from afar off, something to remember in the years that will come, a memory, a shadow that was once for a few glorious minutes a strong fleshy substance. Possibly Hardy has never penned a more exquisite incident or one so full of humanity and so full of pathos and charm.

" ' You know what you forbade me at the maypoling, miss,' murmured the lad, without looking at her, and still stroking the fire-dog's head.

" ' Yes,' said Eustacia, with a little more hauteur. ' You wanted to join hands with me in the ring, if I recollect.'

" ' Half an hour of that and I'll agree, miss.' "

A small request perhaps, but an infinity of hopeless longing behind it. Once and never again.

" Eustacia regarded the youth steadfastly. He was three years younger than herself, but apparently not backward for his age. ' Half an hour of what ? ' she said, though she guessed what.

" ' Holding your hand in mine ! ' "

The bargain is made. We may laugh at the youth, call him foolish, but we shall shiver when we think of those hands we shall never hold again. For they belong elsewhere, or they are fallen to tiny particles of commonplace and unromantic dust.

The end of this delicate incident is not less fascinating than the beginning of it. Poor Charley wants to make the most of the minutes in which he is able to hold Eustacia's hand. He wants to feel that there is more of the bliss to come. But nature is too strong, the contact of the fingers too magnetic. Before he realises it is all over and his crowded minutes have gone and they do not come back.

" ' Yes, miss. But I think I'll have one minute more of what I am owed, if you don't mind.'

" Eustacia gave him her hand as before.

" ' One minute,' she said, and counted on till she reached seven or eight minutes."

It all goes so quickly. Time has no feeling of sympathy for the youth ; it will not prolong itself by one half second.

" ' There, 'tis all gone ; and I didn't mean quite all,' he said, with a sigh.

" ' You had good measure,' said she, turning away.

" ' Yes, miss. Well, 'tis over, and now I'll get home along.' "

Somehow, looking into the far distance we see the youth trudging homeward, his hands warm with the kissing of other hands, but his soul cold, that these " kisses " do not pass by again.

" The Return of the Native " can perhaps be most accurately described as a rather ordinary story told in an extraordinary manner. It is saved from being at all commonplace by the fact that it chose as its author—Thomas Hardy. For the story of a girl and her vacillations in love is ordinary. But the telling is extraordinary. Perhaps the incident of " holding of Eustacia's hand " is one example of what I mean. It turns a commonplace story into something that is the production of a man who already in the career of fiction had fallen very little short, if he had fallen short at all, of genius.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE"

THERE is a decided parallel to much modern fiction in "The Mayor of Casterbridge." In a limited sense Hardy is writing a study that is, not too consciously, of the psycho-analytical nature. And yet it is important to realise that the background of the story is not only non-modern, it is also tragic and romantic. Another characteristic of "The Mayor of Casterbridge" is that pre-eminence is given to the character of a man, whereas in the two books I have already written of it is the feminine character who takes prior place. In this curious book there is no escape, there is a terrible and inevitable movement from bad to worse. It is almost like a poem that begins with a wry smile and moves tenaciously to a point when the wry smile has become desperate and hopeless weeping.

. . . . . .

It is a very disturbing trick of fate that so often subsequent tragedy arises from an incident that is something that looks like a joke and is nothing of the kind. It certainly may be a joke to sell your wife, but it is a dangerous thing to do, if the buyer takes the joke seriously. For it is obvious that the incident in "The Mayor of Casterbridge" when Henchard sells his wife is a serious joke, for men forget that jokes taken seriously may lose the essential qualities of jokishness.

For when Henchard sold his wife to the sailor the seriousness of his position only became apparent when he found the deal had turned out to be a deal.

Hardy is always fond of curious situations, quaint whimsical positions, in which humanity finds itself merely made fun of. For there is something pathetic about poor Henchard at once. He wants to get rid of his wife ; he does it in such a manner that it looks like a joke. The joke is too serious, and then Henchard discovers that what he really wanted to do was to indulge in an unconscious joke. Having sold his wife to the sailor, Henchard's troubles begin. Never for one single instant, even when Henchard is at the summit of his success, does Hardy let us feel that the road he is pursuing for the Mayor is leading to happiness. But again I do not want to anticipate, to generalise about Hardy's pessimism. Perhaps by a discussion of this remarkable book I can show Hardy dealing with a tragic man.

A frightfully tragic man is Henchard ; he has many brains, but an evil twist in his character turns round and wrests him with the determined pertinacity of a Stevensonian imp. It is very difficult, in some ways, to believe that Hardy means Henchard to be entirely responsible for his deplorable actions. It is the old Determinism which makes all evil so impossible of interpretation.

There is always a suggestion that Henchard is " not quite normal." His action in selling his wife seems to be more than anything a move on the part of the unstable part of Henchard. Hardy allows the Mayor of Casterbridge no loophole. If he loves his manager for a time, this love grows to hatred. Again we feel that Henchard is not to be held entirely liable for this change of emotion ; the character of the manager is such that it would inevitably react on Henchard. Again, in a sense, though Hardy has made Hen-

chard a clever character, his cleverness is not sufficiently acute to make up for his sad lack of equilibrium.

The manager who works for Henchard is one of those people to whom it is fatal to allocate too much authority. Farfrae is so efficient that the Mayor gives him too much liberty. Yet—and here is another Hardy dilemma—though Henchard wants to get rid of his manager, he hopes at the same time that such an event will not take place. The curious conflict that divides Henchard's mind is carefully considered.

> "The young man who could now read the lines and folds of Henchard's strongly traced face as if they were clear verbal inscriptions quietly assented; and when people deplored the fact and asked why it was, he simply replied that Mr. Henchard no longer required his help. Henchard went home apparently satisfied. But in the morning when his jealous temper had passed away his heart sank within him at what he had said and done."

The actions of Henchard seldom appear to be in line with the deeper reasonings of his soul. Hardy makes it quite evident that the unfortunate Mayor is the victim of his own illogical mind; try as he will, he does that which, were he to employ his better judgment, he would not do. It is all rather terrible, the way in which Henchard and his manager become bitter enemies. Perhaps there is nothing more horrible than the spectacle of friends becoming enemies, love turning to dislike and then rushing down deeper and deeper until it becomes unrestrained and godless hatred.

Even Henchard cannot have the gloomy satisfaction of revenge—that subtle pleasure, that curious desire—even these are denied him. The dreadful picture is becoming

darker and darker, the gods laugh louder and louder, the victim is stretched on the rack, his agonised mind is vibrating with unappeasable misery.

> " Misery taught him nothing more than defiant endurance of it. His wife was dead, and the first impulse for revenge died with the thought that she was beyond him."

Revenge—you can perhaps help when all is a mist of rage, but you cannot bring back that dead thing, you cannot breathe on it again so that it shall live ; you can only stop us from utter madness that we may know the dead are avenged.

> " He looked out at the night as a fiend. Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him."

There is in this rather sombre picture of a warped mentality another suggestion of that Determinism I have already mentioned. It would be an exaggeration to say that Hardy has created in Henchard a kind of machine, but it is probably not untrue to say that this unfortunate Mayor seems to have no chance of much rational conduct. Hardy does not, with ready sympathy, throw the blame on Henchard, but he is too wise to dogmatise who or what is really responsible.

It is, of course, a sad thing when a man or woman do not achieve any success in life. But it is far more sad when a successful man is in reality a failure. The essence of " The Mayor of Casterbridge " is this depressing theme.

Even with the girl he had thought was his daughter the Mayor manages to find that when she elects to leave, his great wish is that she shall stay. A few lines of dialogue indicate how Hardy quite relentlessly depicts the ever increasing misery of Henchard.

"'Look here,' he said in an altered voice—he never called her by name now—'don't ee go away from me. It may be I've spoke roughly by you—there's something that caused it.'

"'By me?' she said, with deep concern. 'What have I done?'

"'I can't tell you now. But if you'll stop and go on living as my daughter, I'll tell you in time.'"

But Henchard's good intentions never do him any good. They are always expressed when they have no value.

"But the proposal had come ten minutes too late. She was in the fly—was already, in imagination, at the house of the lady whose manner had such charms for her."

. . . . . .

It is a relief to turn to Henchard for the moment playing the rôle of a lover. In this romantic episode poor Henchard is as usual quite unable to see the real trend of events. The one thing he does not realise is that the girl—Lucetta—has thrown her love that it may alight on another man. And the irony—that the other man should be none other than the now hated manager. The small episode which means so much is so admirably described by Hardy.

"A yellow flood of reflected sunlight filled the room

for a few instants. It was produced by the passing of a load of newly trussed hay from the country, in a waggon marked with Farfrae's name. Beside it rode Farfrae on horseback. Lucetta's face became—as a woman's face becomes when the man she loves rises upon her gaze like an apparition."

But unfortunately Henchard notices nothing. In the woman's face he can find no love that is straying elsewhere, he has not noticed the soft glimmer of her eyes which is not for him.

" A turn of the eye by Henchard, a glance from the window, and the secret of her inaccessibility would have been revealed. But Henchard in estimating her tone was looking down so plumb-straight that he did not note the warm consciousness upon Lucetta's face."

So this sad, sad story goes on. Henchard finds no peace anywhere ; he has eyes, but he never sees the way clearly ; he has ears, but they do not interpret rightly the sounds that smite upon them.

Very occasionally there is an incident in this book that is so whimsical, so charming, so human, that it needs to be recorded. Such a one is the awkward social episode when Henchard and Farfrae, meeting at the house of the girl they both love, have a tug-of-war with a prosaic piece of bread and butter. Hardy has all the great artist's skill in depicting the curious little jokes that life thrusts upon its helpless victims.

" ' More bread and butter ?' said Lucetta to Henchard and Farfrae equally, holding out between them a plateful

of long slices. Henchard took a slice by one end and Donald by the other, each feeling certain he was the man meant ; neither let go, and the slice came in two."

A small incident, but a horrid symbol. We are so like bread and butter ; one thing pulls this way, one another, and then, so often, we come right apart. It is perhaps reading too much symbolism into the bread and butter incident to say that Hardy meant Henchard to be that commodity.

Every single contingency fights against Henchard. The weather blasts him with its cruel callousness.

Even when he wants bad weather, the weather with vicious nonchalance remains good ! The more and more we attempt to get into the mind of Hardy as regards this persecuted Mayor, the more sympathy we feel for him, the more may we despair at the evident spite some power has for him. Of course it would be absurd to suggest that Henchard is entirely the victim of adverse circumstances, but without any doubt, once having made the false step of selling his wife, he is pushed down and down relentlessly.

" Henchard had backed bad weather, and apparently lost. He had mistaken the turn of the flood for the turn of the ebb. His dealings had been so extensive that settlement could not long be postponed, and to settle, he was obliged to sell off corn that he had bought only a few weeks before at figures higher by many shillings a quarter. Much of the corn he had never seen ; it had not even been moved from the ricks in which it lay stacked miles away."

There is the now usual consequence.

" Thus he lost heavily."

Not only does Henchard lose the woman he wishes to marry ; the blow is not stunning enough, the woman and her husband move into one of his own houses. . . We can seem to see Henchard more and more miserable, the dreadful closing in of fate, no escape, the most pathetic cry of Smike : " No hope, no hope."

There is a very grim scene when the former Mayor of Casterbridge, after a long period of abstinence from any drinking, decides to break his oath and revert to strong drink. With considerable power Hardy shows the determination with which Henchard goes from bad to worse. He will make no more efforts ; fate has done its worst, but it has not yet quite robbed him of the grosser pleasures of the flesh. There is a striking parallel to Ibsen in that splendidly tragic play " The Master Builder," when he takes a solemn oath to build no more churches.

> " ' Because in twelve days I shall be released from my oath.'
>
> " ' What oath ?'
>
> " ' The oath to drink no spirituous liquid. In twelve days it will be twenty years since I swore it, and then I mean to enjoy myself, please God !' "

When some Royal Personage pays a visit to Casterbridge, the Mayor can only receive him as a mere spectator. The position is absolutely one of reversal all the time. Poor Henchard has no official connection with the town any longer. Perhaps no scene is more brilliantly described than the unofficial reception of the Royal Personage by Henchard ; his last effort at being a person of some importance.

"There were a few clear yards in front of the Royal carriage; and into this space a man stepped before anyone could prevent him. It was Henchard. He had unrolled his private flag, and removing his hat he advanced to the side of the slowing vehicle, waving the Union Jack to and fro with his left hand, while he blandly held out his right to the illustrious Personage."

. . . . . .

Almost too soon, for the skill of a great artist breathes through "The Mayor of Casterbridge," we arrive at the dread spectacle of Henchard and Farfrae engaged in mortal combat. It is only this hateful contingency that shows in its full force to the Mayor his utter degradation. Hardy makes no effort to alleviate the melancholy picture.

"Henchard took his full measure of shame and self-reproach. The scenes of his first acquaintance with Farfrae rushed back upon him—that time when the curious mixture of romance and thrift in the young man's composition so commanded his heart that Farfrae could play upon him as on an instrument. So thoroughly subdued was he that he remained on the sacks in a crouching attitude, unusual for a man and for such a man."

Then—when Farfrae has lost his wife—we get one of those splendid little gems which flow from Hardy leaving us amazed and stirred by their magnificent realism.

"The last of his calls was made about four o'clock in the morning, in the steely light of dawn. Lucifer was fading into day across Durnover Moor, the sparrows were just alighting into the street and the hens had begun to

cackle from the outhouses. When within a few yards of Farfrae's he saw the door gently opened, and a servant raise her hand to the knocker, to untie the piece of cloth which had muffled it. He went across, the sparrows in his way scarcely flying up from the road litter, so little did they believe in human aggression at so early a time.

" ' Why do you take off that ?' said Henchard.

" She turned in some surprise at his presence, and did not answer for an instant or two. Recognising him, she said, ' Because they may knock as loud as they will ; she will never hear it any more.' "

No sound can touch the dead ; we may knock, but there will be no opening. The door is too fast closed.

Perhaps the eccentric misfortunes of the luckless Mayor can be best summed up by a quotation from the end of the book.

" . . . Happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain."

It was so occasional in the life of Henchard that we almost think that Hardy implies it was never there at all. Only perhaps when the breath had left Henchard's body, making him a dead man.

CHAPTER FOUR

"TESS"

THERE is a certain difficulty in dealing with a book that has come to find a place among those rare volumes which have attained to the dignity of being described as classics. It is not easy to approach such a volume with an entirely open mind. The critic, in dealing with a masterpiece, is liable to find himself confronted by certain prejudices. That they come without being asked or even desired does not in any way lessen the fundamental difficulty. The critic, on the one hand, may be shy of attempting to find any blemishes in a masterpiece; he may well feel that he has no conceivable right to question the verdict of many far more able than himself. On the other hand, he may feel so strongly the necessity of not being persuaded too much by the verdict of tradition, that he may find faults where none really exist. In my opinion the critic in dealing with an acknowledged masterpiece should as far as possible free his mind from prejudice and criticise the "great" book as he would examine something that he would perhaps call a more ordinary book. Only by such a method has he any chance of producing a fair criticism and one that is not swayed by the greatness placed before him. In this chapter I shall endeavour to write something of Mr. Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" with the outlook that I have attempted in all my criticisms in other books. That is, I shall hope to get at the essence

of this acknowledged masterpiece by an examination of various points in the book.

. . . . . .

To a certain extent, in " Tess of the D'Urbervilles " Hardy appears to be writing something that might be a plea for a very sincere and uncompromising form of Atheism, or, rather, a subtle and almost dangerous Determinism. And perhaps the latter is more serious because it is the more definite. Atheism has no real value in determining human conduct and human responsibility, but Determinism postulates a very definite and, in my opinion, a very detestable type of Deity. For, in " Tess," Hardy seems to be very positive. He is much more positive than in any of his earlier work. His pessimism is no longer merely a possibility ; it is stated and insisted on with the utmost show of rational dogma. It is almost gloried in as though the writer took a pleasure in upsetting the illusions of those good people who believe because they have been told, and so often believe greatly because they see with eyes that only see that which falls in with their pious belief. Of course, " Tess " is a book that may be interpreted as anti-Christian, but it will have the supreme merit of being anti-Christian because " Tess " is treated by some power that has no apparent semblance whatever to the God who is said to have walked this earth in the form of a despised Carpenter, a despised Carpenter who has eluded those who have been most zealous in His service.

There are those who see in " Tess of the D'Urbervilles " but a very grim and relentless philosophy. They will not be persuaded that there is much to be said for such a philosophy. At least, in the complacency of their own firm beliefs they might realise that Hardy is drawing a woman who all

through her life met nothing that could give the faintest inkling of a beneficent power behind the Universe. Of course, it can be argued that Tess is not true to life, or that the woman was her own enemy. But the fact still remains that the outside world can show at every turn men and women who appear to be but the puppets of a world ruled by a callous and heartless Energy.

I say, then, at the outset that I believe very firmly there is a point of view which makes Mr. Hardy's philosophy in "Tess" not only reasonable, but inevitable. But there is the other side; and it is probably superficial to be too much prejudiced either for or against his doctrines. We can only try and determine whether Tess in her experiences was apparently a mere automaton driven hither and thither or whether she seems to have fashioned her own tragic destiny.

Tess herself is certainly, like so many of Hardy's heroines, a rather weak kind of woman, uncertain in her affections, to a certain extent illogical, and withal, capable of unbounding affection and possessed of almost limitless emotions.

The physical attractions of Tess appear to have been considerable, and it is again a nice little dilemma that nature which gave these to Tess makes most of her troubles result from them. It is the old curious principle of giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

> "A small minority, mainly strangers, would look long at her in casually passing by, and grow momentarily fascinated by her freshness, and wonder if they would ever see her again; but to almost everybody she was a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more."

So soon, poor Tess is in something like despair when the

horse which is taking her home is killed. Even in her dealings with animals everything goes wrong for her. There is always that certain kind of epic aloofness of Tess. Perhaps because, being more silent, she feels so much more. It is the people who say so little who feel so much ; those who seem to be so indifferent who care so deeply ; those who feign a calm *sangfroid* who know that their hearts are nearly broken. At the burial of the horse, Tess is aloof.

> " Then Durbeyfield began to shovel in the earth, and the children cried anew. All except Tess. Her face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess."

It is a strange foreshadowing—something of that coming drama—the " leading up " which is so much a part of the genius of Hardy.

In so many of the heroines that Hardy creates there is radiated a " something " that calls for the sympathy of those who encounter these unfortunate women. It is, I think, to be found in the fact that all Hardy's women seem to be possessed of a horrid feeling of coming evil, a feeling of helplessness, a feeling that any happiness cannot last ; that though there may be transitory joy, sorrow cometh in the morning. These women strive against the inevitable. It is as though they would prevent the advent of the tide by means of scooping out gallons of water. Is Hardy too gloomy in this inevitable thorny path that poor Tess has to tread ? In other words, is her life exaggerated ? I must confess I can see no grounds for any affirmative answers to such a question.

The meeting between Tess and " Durbeyfield," the beginning of the horrid tragedy—it is all done with the hand of a

master. The artist who does not use too much paint or does not use too little ; the thinker who can see the beginnings that can only end in dire misery ; the philosopher who looks onwards and onwards and can only see black, black clouds hurrying along, and almost laughing that they are for ever obscuring the sun from some wretched woman.

> " Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import, she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects—as nearly as humanity can supply the right and desired ; yet to him who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression, half forgotten."

We may well wring our hands in despair at such misery. Perhaps a Divine joke, but a very poor one. What purpose can there be in this ill-assorting of people ? At least Hardy can see none. It throws him back again and again, almost exhausted, to that pernicious Determinism which leaves us wailing, " No hope, no hope."

Hardy puts his point of view with no uncertain emphasis.

> " In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving. Nature does not often say ' See ' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing ; or reply ' Here ' to a body's cry of ' Where ' till the hide and seek has become an irksome, outworn game."

And the worst of it all is that Hardy can see no possible

chance of anything better in the future. Misfits all the time and the gods shaking with cynical laughter and sweating with the profound exuberance of their delicious capers.

> " We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us around and along ; but such completeness is not to be prophesied or even conceived as possible."

And while poor Tess is beginning her agony, her long road to Calvary, the wrong man merely laughs. The gods have tickled him in the ribs. A mere slip of a girl—what does it really matter ? It is ever the same. While we agonise the other person shakes with laughter ; while we beat our hands wildly in the air the other person feels quite unmoved. It is our foolish emotion ; besides, it is giving someone else quite a lot of pleasure. What does D'Urberville mind that Tess in knowing him is knowing the wrong man ? He does not care a jot. Hardy depicts the intensity of the " humorous " situation.

> " When D'Urberville got back to the tent he sat down astride on a chair reflecting, with a pleased gleam in his face. Then he broke into a loud laugh.
>
> " ' Well, I'm damned ! What a funny thing ! Ha-ha-ha ! And what a crumby girl ! ' "

. . . . . .

So far I have discussed something of the gloom or pessimism of " Tess of the D'Urbervilles." I now propose to enter upon an examination of the next most important

part of this book—the love element in it ; the love that is the " reason " of the subsequent tragedy. The lack of love that Tess displays for D'Urberville seems to be described by Hardy in quite simple and natural dialogue. The type of dialogue that might well be used by a hundred other novelists, who would never dream of considering their work of the nature of a classic. There is certainly no fault to be found with it. The conversation shows only too well the wrong man making love to Tess. For love never needs to be made ; it is there, if it is there at all !

" ' Tess, why do you always dislike my kissing you ?'
" ' I suppose—because I don't love you.'
" ' You are quite sure ?'
" ' I am angry with you sometimes !' "

Yet there is in this a certain amount of vacillating about Tess, even in this frank admission. She is not quite sure that she doesn't love D'Urberville. Or rather, she isn't absolutely sure that love will not perhaps come. Somewhat later on Hardy, I think, implies this by some subtle dialogue.

" ' Tessy, don't you love me ever so little now ?'
" ' I'm grateful,' she reluctantly admitted. ' But I fear I do not . . . . ' The sudden vision of his passion for herself as a factor in this result so distressed her that, beginning with one slow tear, and then following with another, she wept outright."

Tess is in the dangerous position when a woman may let gratitude lay so firm a hold of her that she subsequently mistakes it for love. Hardy seems to make no mistake at

all about the curious position between Tess and Alec D'Urberville. All the time there is that sense again of Tess striving against something that is bound to beat her. We never imagine for a single instant that she will ever come out victorious. D'Urberville himself seems to be on the winning side, even in the seemingly impossible task of attempting to make a woman who does not love enter upon that inscrutable and devastating emotion. All through the various pieces of dialogue the vitality of Tess is sapped. Hardy leads on to her tacit surrender with an almost cruel insistence. That dreadful cry of Tess's that she wishes she had never been born—a cry that can only be induced by the direst agony, a cry that is the last utterance before suicide violently tears out the spark of life, leaving nothing but a dishonoured and pathetic corpse.

" ' What are you crying for ?' he coldly asked.

" ' I was only thinking that I was born over there,' murmured Tess

" ' Well—we must all be born somewhere.'

" ' I wish I had never been born—there or anywhere else.' "

Tess is thoroughly beaten—a poor triumph for D'Urberville —a kiss given because fear is the cause. A dead cold thing, a miserable caricature, something that any man may be miserably ashamed to gain.

" She turned her head in the same passive way, as one might turn at the request of a sketcher or hairdresser, and he kissed the other side, his lips touching cheeks that were damp and smoothly chill as the skin of the mushrooms in the fields around."

Even D'Urberville realises that this is only a quarter victory. How delightfully does Hardy put forward the unsatisfied desire of the man.

> " ' You don't give me your mouth and kiss me back. You never willingly do that—you'll never love me, I fear.' "

And Tess gives back the sad reply—sad, for the reply proves the miserable character of her "union" with D'Urberville.

> " ' I have said so often. It is true. I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can ' she added mournfully. ' Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie.' "

The whole affair is so hopeless. Hardy does not allow a single ray of light to make any attempt to penetrate the thick darkness.

There is not the slightest pandering to the reader, who might quite conceivably gasp that he is being slowly but surely drowned in an ocean of tears. The downward process of Tess is painful; the more so that the pain is intimately associated with affection.

We must pass on to the extraordinary episode with Angel Clare. I do feel in some ways that Angel Clare is slightly exaggerated. His priggishness is so detestable that it may be that Hardy dislikes him so much that he has rather overdrawn his unpleasing character. The love that Tess has for Clare is one of those absorbing passions which are absolutely uncompromising and utterly unscrupulous. Tess

is absolutely uncompromising in her love for Clare. There is a suggestion of a Shavian position—the utter relentlessness of woman when she is gripped by her most desired passion.

The very slight interest that Clare displays in Tess for quite a long time is well brought out. Yet there *is* interest, and Clare is not wholly indifferent to her.

> " He concluded that he had beheld her before ; where he could not tell. A casual encounter during some country ramble it certainly had been and he was not greatly curious about it. But the circumstances were sufficient to lead him to select Tess in preference to the other pretty milkmaids when he wished to contemplate contiguous womankind."

A gentle leading up, but again the beginning of a coming tragedy. How true is the Hardy psychology.

One of the best quotations to demonstrate the perpetual " fear " that Tess has of life is, I consider, to be found when she has a conversation with Clare, in the stage when there is a certain mutual interest between them. It depicts something of the inability of Tess to " beat " herself ; something of an inherent weakness ; something, again, of that suggestion that she is in reality but a pathetic puppet. It is not the things in life that terrify her but Life itself.

> " ' But you have indoor fears—eh ?'
> " ' Well—yes, sir.'
> " ' What of ?'
> " ' I couldn't quite say.'
> " ' The milk turning sour ?'
> " ' No !'

" ' Life in general ?'
" ' Yes, sir.' "

That is it, that worst of all fears—terror of something that cannot be defined. Perhaps really fear of oneself. Men and women do not fear actual concrete things in Life. What they do fear is that inevitable impulse which tells over and over again that they have no real power over themselves ; no real and firm Faith ; only a sensation of drifting, a hurtling down stream. Tess drifts ; she is ever carried onward and onward against her will. Hardy again and again shows her to be afraid, yet never really that rather indefinable thing—a coward.

It is refreshing to be able to show Tess for one short period quite happy. That curious and delicious happiness when two people are gradually falling in love though nothing has been said on either side. There is no more exquisite emotion ; that gradual coming together of two persons, so that they are becoming mentally, physically and spiritually —one. The misery is, that so often when they have become one, in the accepted sense of marriage, the one breaks up into two, and the old lovely harmony has gone away, softly crying by itself that its essence is no more.

> " Thus passed the leafy time when arborescence seems to be the one thing aimed at out of doors. Tess and Clare unconsciously studied each other, ever balanced on the edge of a passion, yet apparently keeping out of it. All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale."

If only people would realise that love *is* an irresistible law, a great deal of nonsense that is written about conven-

tional morality would be left unwritten ; a great many pious and cruel platitudes would be left unsaid ; the great natural law would be seen to be something far finer than the mere polite conventions that appear to satisfy people who have too little imagination to be anything but extremely self-complacent. Nothing matters for the moment. Happiness, that warm glow, that tender emotion that sets every limb on fire ; that love which draws another person so near that the contact is delicious pain, that is the happiness, that, loving Clare, Tess experiences. So wonderfully does Hardy write of it. That little bit of Tess's history that is not sadness. It is so pleasing to be able to record it.

> " Tess had never in her recent life been so happy as she was now ; possibly never would be so happy again. She was, for one thing, physically and mentally suited among these new surroundings."

And she had that happiness that for the moment—what mattered was the present. Again Hardy depicts Tess at her one real stage of unworrying bliss.

> " Moreover, she, and Clare also, stood as yet on the debatable land between predilection and love ; where no profundities have been reached ; no reflections have set in ; awkwardly inquiring, ' Whither does this new current tend to carry me ? What does it mean to my future ? How does it stand towards my past ?' "

So quickly is the unworrying stage over ; and we are faced with the unpleasant fact that our new found indescribable happiness has its vicious perplexities.

The extraordinary magnetism of Clare is, in my opinion,

a little inclined to be overstated. But if so, perhaps Hardy could scarcely avoid this, if the love of Tess for Clare was to be reasonable in the terrible lengths to which it was destined to go. I mean, in a word, Clare seems to be a little *made* but Tess is always flesh and blood. Clare is almost the instrument by which is shown the desperate passion of Tess. He is almost, if not quite, an auxiliary. But it is probably unfair to criticise, even a little sternly, Hardy on account of this.

Even when Tess listens to something that is only a rumour —that Clare is in love with another—this false bit of news comes along to make her unhappy.

> " After this disclosure Tess nourished no further foolish thought that there lurked any grave and deliberate import in Clare's attentions to her. It was a passing love of her face, for love's own temporary sake—nothing more."

It would perhaps have been well for Tess if this had been so. Even the extreme bitterness of violent death may be eased by the memory of a sacred and passionate affection. But this is to attempt to apply a supposition to a different history from that which Hardy has penned. But for Tess there seems to be no way out ; even troubles that are not really there at all force their unwelcome attentions on her.

There is also a sad dilemma about the whole thing. Hardy seems to think Tess not worthy of Clare. No doubt a pious standpoint, but a little unimaginative !

> " And the thorny crown of this sad conception was that she whom he really did prefer in a cursory way to the rest, she who knew herself to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, more beautiful than they, was in the eyes

of propriety, far less worthy of him than the homelier ones whom he ignored."

Thus Hardy is on the side, I fear, of dull propriety, but the lapse is merely temporary !

The whole attitude of Tess to Angel Clare is one that, as it were, completely turns her round. She is the ardent and insatiable seeker. Her feeling for Clare is one of reverence, amounting to something that can quite easily be interpreted as worship. Her great desire is that he shall call her by her name. It is one of those rather astonishing human touches of Hardy which are in charming contrast to his sombre and rather detached philosophy. For there is, I think, all through " Tess of the D'Urbervilles " a relative suggestion that Tess is something of an instrument through which Hardy can express his point of view. The marvellous genius of the whole thing is that Tess is so intensely human. But it is pleasing to quote something which not only makes her human, but rather like a child with a new toy.

" She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them."

For nothing is so sweet to a woman as her own name on the lips of the man she adores.

" ' Call me Tess,' she would say, askance ; and he did !

" Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine ; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it."

The hopeless passion of the women for Clare seems to be slightly overdrawn. Their misery and longing is almost too cruel to be quite true. And yet, on the other hand, women cannot be accused of an intense rationalism !

> " The air of the sleeping chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law, an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired."

Again there is the old gloom, Nature—cruel, Nature—unscrupulous, Nature the ally of Determinism. Hardy's insistence, his " pushing " of every situation to this standpoint, would be almost wearying, if there was not the vast artistic genius behind the situations.

If Tess is driven irresistibly to Clare—Clare is driven with just as irresistible an urge to Tess. Passion is the hardest thing in the world to avoid. A man may pray all the gods that he may have the strength not to see any more the woman he loves, but his prayer will be a mockery. For it will be a petition to the gods that his prayer may never be accepted literally. This irresistible urge is written with great force by Hardy when he shows Clare more and more under the spell of Tess.

> " He was driven towards her by every heave of his pulse."

Driven. Is there any word that interprets Hardy's outlook more forcibly ?

Towards the end of the history of Tess we get one or two of the saddest passages, perhaps, any great novelist has

written. The one is when Clare finds that his love for Tess has all come back—come back when it is no longer any use. The other when Tess has to leave him for ever, for cruel men must take away to the bitter callousness of the law. I quote the two passages to show their exquisite pathos, the pain of them that hurts like a violent blow.

" ' I do love you, Tess, I do—it is all come back,' he said, tightening his arms round her with fervid pressure."

Too late—for Tess is a murderess, and so soon her neck will be violently pulled up from her body that her soul may go to see whether after all she was in the hands of a callous monster.

Those lines when Tess leaves Clare. No last dreadful dialogue between two lovers never to meet again has perhaps been more beautifully written than by Hardy.

" ' What is it Angel ?' she said, starting up. ' Have they come for me ?'

" ' Yes, dearest,' he said ; ' they have come.'

" ' It is as it should be,' she murmured. ' Angel, I am almost glad—yes, glad ! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough ; and now I shall not live for you to despise me !'

" She stood up, shook herself, and went forward, neither of the men having moved.

" ' I am ready,' she said, quietly."

And so to the last dreadful paragraph in this great book. When Tess has gone and only her poor violently killed body is left that it may lie down with the earth and get a long quiet sleep.

> " ' Justice ' was done, and the President of the Immortals in Eschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the D'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless ; the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on."

Thus we pass on our pilgrimage a little more sad, not only because Tess is dead, but because we are not sure that The President of the Immortals will not " sport " with us in the same way as the " sporting " with Tess.

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE OR TWO "IRONIES"

It might be thought that Mr. Hardy would find it difficult to excel in the complicated art of the short story. It cannot be said that most of his work errs on the side of brevity. At the same time it would be unfair to suggest that his work is drawn out. Hardy appears to be of that school of literary men who do not wish to be hurried. They have no insane and uncontrolled impulse to arrive at the end of the tale in the quickest possible time. Art abhors a rush, it wishes to proceed in a leisurely manner, almost as a protest against the unseemly rush and vulgarity of the non-artistic world.

It may perhaps be merely superficial to imagine that Hardy is better at long work than at short work. It may be, on the other hand, reasonable to suppose that a writer who writes great length of words may be less efficient if he attempts to use the curious medium of the short story. Leaving these two suppositions on one side, what do we discern ? In my opinion, Hardy in the medium of the short story is certainly as good as in the medium of the long novel. There is not any question of cramping or an unsatisfying finish. We do not feel that Hardy had so much more to say that his short story ought to have been a novel. We experience no sense of an abrupt end—an end forced, as it were, on the writer ; all seems natural and in harmony.

It has been said over and over again that the short story

should be above all things something that is complete, a whole. Hardy appears to fall in with this dogma with the utmost goodwill. His art in this direction fulfils its proper function. In fact, I believe that Hardy excels in the short story as much as Mr. Kipling does. And there will be surely few to deny the high measure of praise implied in such a statement. The truth of the matter is that Mr. Hardy is such a supreme artist that he can always harmonise with the demands made by the particular branch of art in which he is enveloped.

If he is writing a short story he does not pine to turn it into a long novel, in spite of the evident fact that a long tale is pleasing to him. With so many short story writers the impression makes itself felt that they are cramped, unhappy, impatient at a certain necessary brevity, chafing that the story is limited, thus giving the impressions that as artists they themselves are sadly limited. No such impression comes down through the Hardy short stories ; there is no " unhappy " artist behind it all, no restless discontented soul who hates to have to finish ; rather, they vibrate a creator who has found them just suitable for his desires, eminently friendly with his ambitions, elegantly the mirror of his genius.

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It must be apparent to even the purely casual reader that the irony of life would be a subject likely to appeal very greatly to a writer of the mentality of Thomas Hardy. His whole approach to human existence is that fate does the very reverse of the thing we would wish, or think we would wish most. For it always has to be conceded that wishes when gratified as we most desire not seldom turn out to be of the nature of things we should least desire. There is possibly no more admirable picture of this transvaluation

difficulty than that created by the superb play of Sir James Barrie—" Dear Brutus." There is in this play optimism, but when Hardy deals with irony it would be intricate to discover anything that was not pessimism.

In this chapter I hope to discuss somewhat briefly some of the remarkable short stories that Hardy has written under the suggestive title of " Life's Little Ironies." We might well wonder whether Hardy did not chuckle a little sardonically at the word " little." For really some of the ironies seem quite big, even if viewed with as little prejudice as possible.

The whole series of the stories demonstrates Hardy developing the dismal idea of the " sporting " of the " President of the Immortals," the rather sinister figure behind the Universe, the callous " Napoleon," pondering as each of the pawns meets his Waterloo.

The thought will sometimes come that really Hardy seems to think that no condition of life brings any immunity from unhappiness. There is certainly a very strong parallel to Ibsen, in my opinion—a far closer dependence than that so readily accorded to Mr. Shaw. There is surely no more " miserable " writer in the English language than Hardy, and the terrible hopelessness of his " misery " is not so much the incidents depicting this " misery " as the probability that Hardy is right in his surmises. The whole setting of these short tales is again sombre ; the dark clouds roll up and the sun is permanently eclipsed.

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There is a rather unexplainable fact that many women fall desperately in love with a man they have never seen, a man they only know of through a public reputation. . Sometimes, of course, this curious fascination is to be explained by a dis-

satisfaction with their own partner or a subtle link through art. Thus, a woman who writes poetry may quite well fall in love with a poet who writes something of the same sort of poetry. It is but seldom that the love reaches a pitch when it becomes a dangerous obsession, but when it does there is nothing so difficult to cure. For love of a shadowy ideal, even if it be directed at a material substance of flesh and blood, is something lasting, something that can never be fully satisfied. It is something of this strange kind of love which Hardy deals with in " An Imaginative Woman." It is all very tragic, for the woman never meets her unknown lover ; she always just misses seeing him, never realising that, had she done so, the dream might have been smashed, as though hit with a sledge hammer.

And yet, though she never sees him, Mrs. Marchmill conceives a violent passion for the poet. It is one of the Hardy ironies—a very cruel one, and seemingly having no sensible purpose whatever. Mrs. Marchmill is, of course, a very silly woman, but her husband is the type to make any woman who was not silly soon the possessor of that deplorable state. Poor Mrs. Marchmill never meets her poet. And one day—one of those awful days when life seems to stop for us—she hears that he has committed suicide. Hardy draws a terrible picture of her insane grief, her maddening sorrow, and, we cannot laugh, all about a man she had never set eyes upon.

> " Her grief and distraction shook her to pieces ; and she lay in this frenzy of sorrow for more than an hour. Broken words came every now and then from her quivering lips : ' O, if he had only known of me—known of me—me ! . . . O, if I had only once met him—only once ; and put my hand upon his hot forehead—kissed—let him

know how I loved him—that I would have suffered shame and scorn, would have lived and died, for him !"

And then—the very peculiar idea, that such would have been a stealing from the Divine Prerogative. It is a curious mystical idea, some way removed from Hardy's Determinism in Tess.

"'Perhaps it would have saved his dear life. . . . But no . . . it was not allowed ! God is a jealous God ; and that happiness was not for Him and me."

But it is a little perplexing if the happiness of God is only to be obtained through not allowing a kindly woman the chance of saving a young poet from the agony and waste of suicide. There is surely some considerable superficiality in Hardy's reasoning here.

The irony continues its merry way until Mrs. Marchmill dies in giving birth to a child. Then, as though to pursue the unfortunate woman beyond the grave, fate turns round and the husband suspects it is the poet's child. And Mrs. Marchmill had not even had the satisfaction of ever having seen the poet !

"By a known but inexplicable trick of Nature there were undoubtedly strong traces of resemblance to the man Ella had never seen ; the dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue."

The husband is now quite certain and he no doubt experiences a curious joy at the "proved" treachery of the wife who was always far too good for him.

" ' I'm damned if I didn't think so !' murmured Marchmill. ' Then she did play me false with that fellow at the lodgings ! Let me see ; the dates—the second week in August . . . the third week in May . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . . Get away, you poor little brat ! You are nothing to me.' "

This tragic little story, which is told so delicately by Hardy, seems once more to imply that the Ruler of the Universe is a little unkind, and, as the victim is a woman, a little lacking in chivalry. As for the poet, he died young, but the gods did not seem to love him, or if they did, they might have called him otherwise than by a pistol bullet smashing through his right temple.

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It has been said pretty often that no more cruel fate than that which overtook Tess could possibly have been conceived. Such thinking is merely shallow, and suggests death to be the zenith of all the evils. It would have been obviously far worse if Tess had become insane than that she should have been hanged by the neck until she was dead. I go back to Tess because a very tragic short story of Hardy's seems so much to remind of her. In that amazingly fine drama, " To Please His Wife," Hardy is making the Power behind the Universe more subtly cruel than before. For this Power drives a woman mad, and the sea is allowed to be the instrument of this dire work.

In the tragic story Hardy is dealing very sincerely with the type of woman who wishes to get riches, not so much for what they may bring as for the doubtful pleasure of being equal to the riches of some other woman. The innate envy of woman and her callous wish to satisfy this envy is very clearly stated by Hardy. Mrs. Jolliffe is not content

that she has married the man of her choice ; she is not even satisfied to be the mother of his children. She must have more money ; the old cry that turns men into machines and women into automata ; the old cry that obliterates Heaven and uplifts Hell ; the old cry upon which our civilisation will assuredly fall.

" ' Don't speak of bygones,' she implored in stern sadness.

" ' But think for the boys' and my sake, if not for your own, what are we to do to get richer ?' "

And there is only one way to do this for a sailor. He must once more go to sea. How irresistibly the woman drives her husband out when she is in the cursed grip of the lust for money. It changes her whole character. Hardy puts the transition in so few words, but they mean so much. Affection, society instead of loneliness, it all goes for the chink, chink of the heartless gold.

" She had been the very one to keep him at home, hating the semi-widowed existence of sailor's wives. But her ambition checked her instincts now, and she said:

" ' Do you think success really lies that way ?' "

But the gold brings the inevitable disappointment. The fortune which seems so much to the sailor who has obtained it is so little in the eyes of the greedy and unsatisfied wife. Hardy once again points the fact that nearly everything, if not absolutely everything, leads to disillusion.

" With this he pulled out an enormous canvas bag, full and rotund as the money bag of the giant whom Jack

slew, untied it and shook the contents out into her lap as she sat in her low chair by the fire."

The first excitement over, the hard earned money seems so paltry.

"'It is a lot of gold, indeed,' she said. 'And is this all?'"

At last the whole family go to sea, and the grasping woman is left alone. That they never come back is Hardy's way of showing that they ought never to have gone. But madness descends on the miserable woman. A more hopeless outlook has never been the lot of any Hardy character. Mrs. Jolliffe is cursed with the forlorn hope that some day her husband and boys will return. But the sea is too greedy; it loves three good substantial sailor men; it cares not that a wretched woman is going slowly mad through remorse and grief.

The last few lines of the story are dreadful lines. There is not a ray of hope, the only hope when Mrs. Jolliffe goes down to her dark grave. Mrs. Jolliffe has thought that her dear ones are back. A pleasing little trick of an overwrought brain.

"The wretched woman walked wildly up and down with her bare feet—there was not a soul. She returned and knocked with all her might at the door which had once been her own—they might have been admitted for the night, unwilling to disturb her till the morning. It was not till several minutes had elapsed that the young man who now kept the shop looked out of an upper window, and saw the skeleton of something human standing below half dressed.

" ' Has anybody come ?' asked the form.

" ' Oh, Mrs. Jolliffe, I didn't know it was you,' said the young man, kindly, for he was aware how her baseless expectations moved her. ' No ; nobody has come.' "

And nobody ever will come. Perhaps poor Mrs. Jolliffe's mad hope is better than a bitter and hopeless despair. It is a subtle way that Hardy has of showing sympathy.

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It is no doubt a trite saying that time effaces everything. And it is about as untrue as it is trite. A wrong done, it matters not how many years ago, time never wipes out. No definite action may ever be taken to right the wrong, but the memory of it persists so long as memory exists.

In one of his short stories, " For Conscience' Sake," Hardy deals rather satirically with the attempt after many years to put things right. The attempt is no doubt gallant, but the result can scarcely be termed a success. I suppose one of the real reasons is that though we may be much the same, the other person has changed so much that he does not even desire that the wrong shall be put right. Or what is much more dreadful, it is too late for him ; nothing we can do can make any amends.

The wrong that Mr. Millborne has done is a very old one, one of those wrongs which make their appearance somewhere every single day and probably every single night. An offer of marriage and then—the misery that no marriage ever takes place. And then Mr. Millborne, troubled by conscience, thinks that he can make amends after twenty years have slipped by, a third of a lifetime, twenty miserable years to turn a young hopeful woman into something old and sad. Mr. Millborne puts his shabby story into a few pathetic words.

" ' I promised her marriage, took advantage of my promise, and, am a bachelor.' "

Mr. Millborne intends to try and put the wrong right. The doctor to whom he confides his ambition is sceptical as to the wisdom of the step.

" ' I wish you luck in the enterprise,' said Doctor Bindon. ' You'll soon be out of that chair, and then you can put your impulse to the test. But . . . . after twenty years of silence . . . I should say, don't.' "

It is unnecessary to say more than that Mr. Millborne's good intention has no good effect whatever. It is quite obvious that Hardy would not have us obey conscience too rigidly. But once again there is something deeper than this in his philosophy. The attempt to make amends leads to no sort of happiness. It is true that there should be punishment for an offence, but when an effort is made to try and put the offence right, it seems a little hard that this act of virtue should merely have the effect of inflicting a greater punishment on all concerned. It seems as though vengeance is for ever, forgiveness is never to be obtained. There is certainly a reverse idea in this short story to that displayed in the teachings of the Synoptic Gospels. For old Mr. Millborne certainly endeavoured to make a new start, to put his house in order, and the only encouragement he gets is to find that he has got into a worse muddle than before. It even drives the unfortunate gentleman to the delights of drinking! Hardy ends on rather a sombre note —human wreckage drifting, waiting until it shall be borne out to sea on the turn of the tide and not return.

" Occasionally he had to be helped to his lodgings by his servant from the Cercle he frequented, through having imbibed a little too much liquor to be able to take care of himself. But he was harmless, and even when he had been drinking said little."

Though Hardy is not dealing with quite such a bitter theme as usual, at the same time it is not very far removed from pessimism. A wrong that can never be put right. It is not a cheerful thought. Attempted amends merely resulting in worse chaos. It is not of the nature of a gospel of pure and simple joy.

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Of the remaining short stories in the volume, " Life's Little Ironies," I have picked out one " The Son's Veto," as it deals with something that is very closely allied to snobbery. In this tale, Hardy is considering the difficult question of a son who rather despises his less educated mother.

It is a very crude subject—blood relationship at its very worst. We could have been content had the son merely deplored the grammatical errors of his mother, but it does not stop at that. He interferes and finally wrecks his mother's happiness. Hardy makes no attempt to argue, he coldly states the tragedy in all its blackness. There is the rather natural and clumsy school boy correction when the mother makes a slip about the use of a verb. It is all very natural, and at present the boy is a mere machine, one of the many thousands who are turned out of our public schools. Boys whose imagination is seldom sufficient to make them anything more than highly polished and superficial snobs.

" ' Has, dear mother—not have ! ' exclaimed the public school boy, with an impatient fastidiousness that was almost harsh. ' Surely you know by this time !' "

The essential difficulty of the situation is so admirably stated by Hardy. It is a natural law—inexorable, unbending, harsh and without sympathy.

" ' No, I am not a lady,' she said sadly. ' I never shall be. But he's a gentleman, and that—makes it—O how difficult for me.' "

But even so, it is a little harsh that this son who is a " gentleman " is also a profound and pious clerical prig. Hardy has a contempt for him. For he cannot even appreciate his mother's overwhelming affection.

" As yet he was far from being man enough—if he ever would be—to rate these sins of hers at their true infinitesimal value beside the yearning fondness that welled up and remained penned in her heart till it should be more fully accepted by him, or by some other person or thing."

But possibly Mr. Hardy is here a little fallacious in using the word " infinitesimal." These grammatical slips, the little non-understandings of what society does understand, the wrong expressions used, all these are of considerable magnitude to the public school boy. Nothing could perhaps hurt a public schoolboy so much as that his mother should refer to a pack of dogs, or that she should refer to a full room at the theatre. No, Hardy is mistaken in the use of his word in this instance. But there is no excuse for the subsequent interference with his mother's wish to marry

which gives Hardy yet another chance to end a short story on a note of sadness.

The wretched woman cannot marry the man of her choice, while her son, in his fresh priest-like innocence, is quite certain that his mission will make the world so much better. It does not signify in the least that he is driving his mother to a grave that is the logical outcome of frustrated love. We must of course save the world, make it better, preach the necessity of happiness, but never by any chance are we to practise those doctrines if social rules are likely to be violated.

> " Some four years after this date a middle-aged man was standing at the door of the largest fruiterer's shop in Aldbrickham. He was the proprietor, but to-day, instead of his usual business attire, he wore a neat suit of black, and his window was partly shuttered. From the railway station a funeral procession was seen approaching ; it passed his door and went out of the town towards the village of Gaymead. The man, whose eyes were wet, held his hat in his hand as the vehicles moved by ; while from a mourning coach a young smooth-shaven priest in a high waistcoat looked black as a cloud at the shopkeeper standing there."

Everything in these tales seems to concentrate on making unhappiness for those who are forced to live in the Universe. A thick blanket hangs over everyone. Groping wearily through a dense fog, the emerging merely reveals in the distance a fog of still greater intensity. There appears to be no way out.

CHAPTER SIX

HARDY AND A TEMPERAMENT

One of the most successful of the Shavian plays is one that is not so popular as it might be. It has the diverting title of " The Philanderer," and being a veritable tragedy, is usually hailed as a Comedy ! In his curious kind of tract, " The Well Beloved," Hardy, to a limited extent, is dealing with a somewhat harmless but rather pitiful philanderer. Hardy deals with this philanderer in a rather gloomy sincere manner ; while Shaw dissects the philanderer with no mercy, so that the unfortunate man not only hasn't a leg to stand upon, he has the transparency of a skeleton. But Hardy is never really severe as Shaw so often is ; he is probably too sympathetic and unsatisfied, while Shaw is so conscious of his own cleverness, that he has no idea when it becomes mere cleverness. I mean, Shaw is a little hard on his philanderer, he has no real feeling for him, but Hardy so far forgets his theological position that he has something that is nearly a *spiritual* feeling for the weaknesses and ideals of Mr. Pierston.

We do not live very long in this world before we make the very painful discovery that there are a great many things that we must not do. Things which are quite harmless until we have reached the horrid and inevitable stage of growing up. Thus, very early on in the book that I am examining Avice learns that a girl has to be careful of her kisses as soon as she begins the process of leaving her early

years in the background. The actual action is probably not thought about much because it is so universal. As a matter of fact there is tragedy in the incident. For it is the beginning of knowledge that something in itself which is beautiful cannot be indulged to the full because the effect of the beautiful action is the reverse of good.

It seems perfectly impossible for Hardy to write more than two or three pages without bringing in something which is sad and afar off from happiness. Avice, by her thoughtless and profoundly innocent action of a spontaneous kiss, learns the beginnings of feelings of sorrow and remorse. Hardy gives a picture of her girlish distress very truly and with relentless realism.

> " ' I—I didn't think about how I was altered,' said the conscience stricken girl. ' I used to kiss him, and he used to kiss me before he went away.' "

Then comes the melancholy truism. Years make such a difference ; the innocent kiss is something that can burn with a frightful fire, create unconsidered longings, turn a man into something that may be a deadly danger to a girl. It is all summed up in the simple but telling sentence that Hardy writes.

> " ' But that was years ago, my dear.' "

Once more we can have no control over our emotional gifts. We may kiss, merely wishing to demonstrate by something like a sacrament, and instead we give something that may have a far reaching result that grows not less with the swift passage of the years. I think that Hardy is once again by a sentence depicting a simple incident dwelling on the doctrine and philosophy of inevitability.

" ' But that was years ago, my dear.' "

But perhaps Hardy makes the incident have too much effect on Avice. It is one of those pieces of character drawing when it is difficult not to suggest that he may be guilty of a slight exaggeration. I say this with considerable care, as it is obvious that Avice is a very highly strung young person. But her expressed wish, if true, is rather a dreadful aftermath to a thoughtlessly given and perfectly sincere kiss.

" ' I wish I was dead.' "

It has, of course, to be conceded that most persons who express this pious sentiment must not be taken too seriously. Or, at any rate, their desire must be considered in the nature of those things which should be labelled as temporary. All the same, I am not at all sure Hardy is not exaggerating slightly in attributing this expression to Avice. But then many of the heroines of Hardy express the desire to taste of death, and certainly many of them would probably have been much better off if they had never lived to pronounce this dire desire. It is not a fuss about nothing—this distress of Avice, but it seems somewhat like as *much* as possible out of a little. It is not the incident which is tragic but the fact that Avice has learnt that she is not Peter Pan; she cannot any longer do what she likes with her simple kisses.

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In " The Well Beloved " I have already suggested that there is some resemblance to Mr. Shaw's " The Philanderer." Another play of Mr. Shaw's, " Candida," has something

that is parallel to "The Well Beloved." It will be remembered that in the play "Candida," Eugene Marchbanks is, more or less, unconsciously in love with an ideal. In this book of Hardy's, in a somewhat similar manner, Pierston is also in love with an ideal. The difference in the two ideals is that Eugene seems to think his ideal can be found in loving a very concrete and married woman, while Pierston finds it difficult to realise that *any* kind of woman will come up to his sought-for ideal. Hardy verges on a vague mysticism, that love of love which expresses itself in either poetic fancies or wild and improbable dread. Pierston has a peculiar temperament.

Not only is Hardy slightly mystical in "The Well Beloved," he is also not far from the interesting art of psychoanalysis. Somewhat like "The Mayor of Casterbridge," this book is a study of a man not in any case a villain, but rather a weak man because he is searching for something beyond humanity. His weakness is that he does not give enough credit to the powers of humanity to satisfy his rather indefinite longings.

Hardy seems to imply that men can be so diligent in searching for perfection that they become blind and incapable of perceiving it when it is there. Pierston is not a particularly interesting character; his idealism is less attractive than the villainy of The Mayor of Casterbridge. But I believe that Hardy would agree villains are usually more interesting than idealists and are much more likely to be successful in their searchings.

Pierston in his mystical quest is continually vacillating. He is as unstable as most of the Hardy heroines. And this is saying a good deal. His mind is a bewildering chaos of conflicting emotions. The curious way in which he gradu-

ally becomes conscious of the wane of love for his first love is shown clearly enough.

> " He was not sure that he had ever seen the real Beloved in that friend of his youth, solicitous as he was for her welfare. But, loving her or not, he perceived that the spirit which called itself his Love was flitting stealthily from some remoter figure to the near one in the chamber overhead."

Sometimes it is as if Hardy is making fun of Pierston, showing him up to be a kind of machine first attracted by one woman and then with amazing rapidity by the next one who comes along.

> " ' In the course of ten minutes he adored her.' "

Having deserted his first love, Pierston is very soon carried away by the charms of the second. When Miss Bencombe writes to her fiancé to tell him she is to marry another, we get Hardy writing some lines of dialogue which bring out all too clearly some of the feminine callousness that belongs to certain types of women. Miss Bencombe is certainly one of them.

> " Marcia thereupon wrote out a reply to that effect, Jocelyn helping her to shape the phrases as gently as possible.
>
> " ' I repeat ' (her letter concluded) " that I had quite forgotten ! I am deeply sorry ; but that is the truth. I have told my intended husband everything, and he is looking over my shoulder as I write.' "

That is the extra little feminine stab, all part of the extra triumph, and Hardy has got it to a nicety.

When Marcia retorts to Pierston about the fact that she has forgotten her former lover, she retorts in a fashion which shows her not to be without debating skill.

" ' I have only proved false through forgetfulness, but you have while remembering.' "

All the way through, Pierston is perfectly conscious of his vacillating, and he merely excuses himself that it is all part of the quest for the ideal. His journey after this elusive being allows Hardy to write some delicate irony which is not without a little tempered malice.

" His whimsical isle-bred fancy had grown to be such an emotion that the Well-Beloved—now again visible—was always existing somewhere near him. For months he would find her on the stage of a theatre ; then she would flit away, leaving the poor empty carcase that had lodged her to mumm on as best it could without her—a sorry lay figure to his eyes, heaped with imperfections and sullied with commonplace."

There is, of course, in all this something of the usual Hardy gloom, nothing leading to any happiness, nothing at all lasting.

Pierston puts his uncomfortable and unsatisfying position concisely enough. Nothing that is embodied in flesh is really of any use at all.

" As flesh she dies daily, like the Apostle's corporeal self ; because when I grapple with the reality she's no longer in it, so that I cannot stick to one incarnation if I would."

The word " cannot " is very characteristic of Hardy. No matter how they try, none of his characters appears able to fight against fate with any success. Of course, Pierston's fate is not so hard as the fate of many other of Hardy's characters, but the same kind of inevitable force presses him down.

Very soon Pierston has dealings with the type of woman who is designated a woman of the world. Though he is still a philanderer, he is older, and therefore a little more careful and not quite so callous as before. His love-making has an evolutionary strain about it.

> " He was now over forty, she was probably thirty ; and he dared not make unmeaning love with the careless selfishness of a younger man."

Very skilfully does Hardy indicate this more mature, careful point of view.

" The Well Beloved " is in some ways the most straightforward and simple of Mr. Hardy's works. It is a tale that is, as I have already suggested, something of a tract or moral treatise. It is a study, but perhaps not a very penetrating one, of a man who philanders, not so much because he likes various women as for the reason that he cannot make up his mind that any of them would really satisfy his conception of love. The actual events in the book may be a little exaggerated. But if so, they read pleasantly enough, and the evolution of Pierston proceeds along logical lines.

At the end poor Mr. Pierston loses his ideals and gives up his search for the Well Beloved.

> " His business was, among kindred undertakings which followed the extinction of the Well Beloved and other

ideals, to advance a scheme for the closing of the old natural fountains in the Street of Wells, because of their possible contamination, and supplying the townlet with water from pipes, a scheme that was carried out at his expense, as is well known."

Mr. Pierston is so like many of us, quite human and at times quite inhuman ; sometimes in hot pursuit of some ideal and then, more or less, defeated, absorbed in mere mundane and ordinary business pursuits. " The Well Beloved " is a human book, yet it depicts a hopeless quest for the spiritual.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A TRAGIC MAN

A CERTAIN concensus of opinion seems to be agreed that the women that Thomas Hardy writes of are beings tossed hither and thither by a somewhat callous and cruel Power. Not so much attention appears to have been paid to the fact that fate is not too kind to the Hardy men. It would be rather interesting to ask which is the more melancholy book—" Tess of the D'Urbervilles " or " Jude the Obscure." And the answer would probably ultimately depend upon the intricate problem of *values*. For it might evolve itself into a consideration as to whether hanging was more melancholy than premature death amid a chaos of smashed ambition and annihilated ideals. It might then further evolve itself into a discussion as to whether the melancholy Determinism in " Tess " to which I have referred, was not even more pronounced in the case of Jude. And again the conclusion would probably be inconclusive and dependent upon what was considered the greater failure, the life of Tess or the life of Jude. For my part, I believe, in some ways, " Jude the Obscure " is the most savagely depressing book that Mr. Hardy has written ; and it is, in my opinion, this, because a man who fails and fails utterly is the most deplorable thing in this world of innumerable deplorable actualities.

. . . . . .

What I shall attempt to do in this chapter is to follow something of the life of Jude. The progress is one of great

misery, external events conspire against him, but they are not so deadly as the temperament which has a tenacious grip of Jude. For Jude is always engaged in the most hopeless of all fights, the fight against self. Jude is a veritable symbol, almost a concrete application of the Pauline dilemma. He is a picture of the man determining to go to the right and invariably going not only to the left, but to the wrong. And all the time he knows that he wants to do big things, to be something of worth in the Church, to help others in the hopeless fights that leave him bruised and beaten every single time.

In his very young days Jude is somewhat strange. He actually sheds tears that his master is leaving the school. Cynicism is not necessarily employed when it is said that most boys howl with relieved laughter at the departure of a master. But not so Jude ; he is sad, gloomy ; the parting hurts him because he likes the master. But more so because it proves so soon to him that life soon brings the horrid inevitable partings and sadnesses.

> " The cart creaked across the green and disappeared round the corner by the rectory-house. The boy returned to the draw-well at the edge of the greensward, where he had left his buckets when he went to help his patron and teacher in the loading. There was a quiver in his lip now, and after opening the well-cover to begin lowering the bucket, he paused and leant with his forehead and arms against the frame-work, his face wearing the fixity of a thoughtful child's who has felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time."

And it is not long before Jude also finds that most people have no sympathy with sorrow ; they are much too business-

like ; the work of the days must be got on with ; any kind of sentiment is merely weak and foolish. So Jude is suddenly awakened from his reverie by the anger of an old wretch of a woman who orders him to get busy, and get busy quickly.

> " His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden outcry : " ' Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harlican.' "

Sorrow must be ever lonely ; there is no time for it to be shared with other people. Besides, it is not worth while ; they never understand ; no one would understand Jude—except Thomas Hardy !

The outlook of Jude at an early stage of his life is very similar to that of Peter Pan. But the desire of Jude is much more serious than that of Barrie's Peter Pan. Barrie makes Peter Pan whimsical in his hatred of growing up, while Hardy is the very opposite of whimsical. His seriousness in Jude is sometimes quite alarming. But Jude has some quite good reasons why he does not wish to leave boyhood. A long quotation showing them is not out of place, as they reflect a good deal of the Hardy philosophy. For, I think, in Jude more than in perhaps any other of his volumes Hardy is " using " a character. I think, even more than he " uses " Tess. It is almost as if he had a parallel method of art to Bernard Shaw.

> " Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pig-sty. The fog had by this time become more translucent, and the position of the sun could be seen through it. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite

as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived."

If it is objected that Jude has too " grown up " thoughts, the suggestion that Hardy is " using " him may be profitably recollected.

And also, Jude, in spite of his dislike of growing up, is all the time most abominably grown up. So the charge that Hardy makes him express too mature thoughts seems to fail for want of any conclusive evidence.

Jude is so desperately confused by life—and we all are when we are foolish enough to think about it ! This feeling of being the centre of a mäelstroom is very typical of Hardy.

" All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and scorched it."

If we are not to be too depressed by Hardy's philosophy of life, it is as well to ponder over the word " seemed." For the problem, at any rate in " Jude," is whether the mutterings are internal or external. Whether the blows dealt at the little cell of life come from within or without. In a good many ways, in " Jude," they appear to come from within. It does not, of course, solve the ultimate problem, but it suggests the possibility of an indefinite Free Will which is better accepted the less it is pondered over.

It is indeed rather noteworthy, and a little disturbing, that nearly all problems of a metaphysical nature are the least obscure when they are just accepted on the unsatisfactory

grounds of Authority. Or, rather, if it be said that acceptance on grounds of Authority is satisfactory provided the Authority is "satisfactory," many demand that Reason should arrive at the same conclusion as that reached by Authority. I mean, Jude experiences blows from within, thus pointing to the need for the application of Free Will. At the same time his Reason leads him to feel aggrieved with fate, or, at least, Hardy appears to be aggrieved for him. It is possibly part of the weakness of Hardy that he rather shuns the metaphysical. He apparently would wish to reduce *all* happenings to the material. I cannot see, for the most part, that he has any sympathy with or even conception of the profoundly metaphysical position so well defined by St. Paul. The possible heavy buffeting of the body, the giving over to Satan, that in the end the soul may derive benefit. The method of such benefit is, of course, another problem and it is no part of our discussion. What is suggested is that in some ways Hardy is so material that he sees *all* evil, when evil perhaps only exists (an insoluble problem) that it may lead to ultimate good.

Now and again Hardy departs from his austere and gloomy reasonings and writes something that is quite unaffectedly beautiful. In "Jude the Obscure" the tense pessimism of the whole book is relieved by such passages. There is one very rare gem when Jude imagines that the wind having been to the city of Christminster has brought something of the atmosphere of that city back with it. It is a singularly lovely idea, the perfect blending, for once, of nature and the rather unformed hopes of Jude. It is almost as if nature was trying to make some amends to him for seeming to hem him in. It is something of the law of compensation, which law Hardy seems to think too little about. Or, rather, he thinks too little about it on its "levelling up" mission.

"'You,' he said, addressing the breeze caressingly, 'were in Christminster city between one and two hours ago, floating along the streets, pulling round the weather cocks, touching Mr. Phillotson's face, being breathed by him, and now you be here, breathed by me—you the very same!'"

This is surely one of the most delightful little touches that Hardy has given us. It is so like Barrie, so like the delicate whimsical ideas that come to men and women who see nature as a friend, and not, as Hardy does so much, as a cruel and callous enemy.

And not only is the wind a gentle friend, it is also something that gets poor Jude away from the difficulties of his own life. What gets us more from our own sorrows than the swish of the wind, the sighing of it in the trees, the gentle murmur of the sea, the rush of the mountain torrent, the gentle breeze that heralds the coming of night and also heralds the coming certainty at no great distance of the new-born day?

"He had become entirely lost to his bodily situation during this mental leap, and only got back to it by a rough recalling."

Even if we do so rapidly get back, we can thank the powers that be that we have been permitted, even for a few moments, to be at one with nature, lifted up into the eternal, freed from the temporals, almost part of the realities of the Universe; lifted away from the foolish little world built by men and built on the most shifting sand possible. The wind is kind to Jude, for the wind is far-seeing; it sees where it will shriek through in a few minutes; it sees Jude, so soon to be swept here, swept there by every miserable torment.

Hardy has made the wind sympathetic ; it has repaid him by allowing him to write a beautiful passage, a piece of poetic prose, a glimpse of nature's humanity, a glance at the soul of a boy for a few minutes buoyed up by the ecstasies of the imagination.

I think we do well to ponder over this exquisite passage about the wind, for it proves that Hardy has some conception of Divine kindness, even if it is almost entirely eliminated by his insistence on Divine cruelty—if we can be permitted to use a term, that we must hope is really quite contradictory.

It may have been noticed that Hardy has a perfect genius for depicting queer bargains between people. Bargains that are reminiscent almost of those delightful nursery rhymes which are the more delightful the further we get away from the nursery. Jude makes one of the strange bargains with an itinerant quack physician. The delightful episode is natural and Hardy in a very characteristic mood.

Jude wishes in his ignorance to get some grammars, for he thinks they will teach him a language.

> " ' Where will you be with the grammars ? '
>
> " ' I shall be passing here this day fortnight at precisely this hour of five-and-twenty minutes past seven. My movements are as truly timed as those of the planets in their courses.'
>
> " ' Here I'll be to meet you,' said Jude.
>
> " ' With orders for my medicines ? '
>
> " ' Yes, Physician.' "

Grammars in exchange for more customers. It is all a little simple and full of charm.

And the wretched grammars bring very much misery, for Jude suddenly realises what a frightful long way it is to

travel, that journey from a rough boy of the land to a polished scholar of the city. We are more than ever pleased that the wind was kind and gentle to Jude. The grammars have behaved very badly, probably being a little snobbish!

> " ' What brains they must have in Christminster and the great schools,' he presently thought, ' to learn words one by one up to tens of thousands ! ' There were no brains in his head equal to this business ; and as the little sun rays continued to stream in through his hat at him he wished he had never seen a book, that he might never see another, that he had never been born."

And it is almost impossible not to believe that it would not have been good for Jude if he had never been born, but that is again to perniciously ignore any metaphysical considerations. But Hardy can scarcely give us any more terrible picture than a boy, hardly beginning life, wishing that he had never been called upon to embark upon the journey at all. I believe the situation is more appalling than the awful moment when we see the last of Tess, hear her broken words, weep that she will never kiss us again, agonise that her neck is to be the target of an instrument to send her to a vile and utterly unmoral death. Yet even so, Jude's cry is surely more tragic, for he has not had the fleshly joys that came once or twice to Tess.

The " plot " of " Jude " is rather a simple one. It is a conflict between Jude and his ideals and Jude and two women. That the women win is only to be expected, as it seems to be an inevitable law that they should. At least in the case of a man like Jude, who is certainly weak in the flesh, if potentially strong of soul.

It is also no doubt very much the wish of Hardy that

Jude should not be too much blamed for his lapses. The longer Jude lives, the more apparent does it become to him that the life he wishes to choose—the life of the scholar, the life of contemplation—ever becomes farther and farther away. Jude is like so many of us. When we are round that next corner then we shall really achieve what we intend to do. But at that next corner we discover that there is a still more intricate turn and then again such a bend that we no longer attempt it. Jude soon finds out all this. Thinking all will be well when he gets to the city of Christminster, when he is there he finds the fight has hardly begun at all.

> "It was not till now, when he found himself actually on the spot of his enthusiasm, that Jude perceived how far away from the object of that enthusiasm he really was. Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life; men who had nothing to do from morning till night, but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall, but what a wall."

Indeed, what a wall! A wall that Jude never climbs over. A wall that persistently keeps him on the other side. A wall that is so great a gulf no bridge can span it. A wall that is perhaps constructed by Hardy's fierce and uncompromising Determinism.

Every act that Jude does seems to be an act that turns round and utterly slays him. He introduces his old master to a girl, only to find that this master is fully desirous of loving the girl. It is the old Hardy irony once again. Life laughing up its sleeve, jeering at the mess Jude is making of it.

"The ironical clinch to his sorrow was given by the thought that the intimacy between his cousin and the schoolmaster had been brought about entirely by himself."

So the years pass, and Jude gets more and more certain that he is one of those people who will never succeed, never do anything to make the world term them a success; one of those people who slip into the background and are gradually engulfed.

Jude has a conversation with his wife when they meet again after a long separation. The dialogue discloses, only too certainly, the failure of Jude to achieve anything he had hoped to achieve.

"'Then you are not a Don yet?'
"'No.'
"'Not even a Reverend?'
"'No.'
"'Nor so much as a Rather Reverend dissenting gentleman?'"

Then Jude gives the sad reply—

"'I am as I was.'"

But even so, the reply is not quite true. For Jude has sunk considerably lower than he was when he heard the wind whisper to him what it had done a few minutes before in the city of Christminster.

While it is obvious that Hardy intends Jude to be very highly developed sexually, it would be unfair to suggest that Hardy considers him a sexual pervert. Disillusion plays no little part in the evolution of his sex life. Smashed ideals

drive him to women, and the women he is driven towards complete the iconoclastic tendencies of Jude's life with sincere determination. Yet they are not exactly to blame. Hardy is not really severe with any one in "Jude the Obscure."

The end of Jude is a scene of unrelieved misery. In a little room, this young man who meant to do so much dies alone, while outside the population shouts with merriment at the boisterous merriment of an old English fair. Who cares that an obscure youth has died? Who cares that he has been an absolute failure? Who cares that nature, after being once kind to him has driven him down and down and down?

The death of Jude is one of the most sorrowful scenes that Mr. Hardy has written. It throbs with cold despair, for Hardy does not speculate on a possible compensation beyond the grave.

> "As soon as he could speak he murmured, his eyes still closed: 'A little water, please.'
>
> "Nothing but the deserted room received his appeal, and he coughed to exhaustion again—saying still more feebly: 'Water, some water, Sue. Arabella!'
>
> "The room remained still as before. Presently he gasped again: 'Throat—water—Sue—darling—drop of water—please! O please!'"

But there is no one to even help him die, to give him any last human aids. Alone, he has to go out; alone his soul must travel across the tall spires of the churches of Christminster; alone he has to leave the city which was once to him a City on a High Hill, but has become merely the city in which he gasps out his life alone.

" No water came, and the organ notes, faint as a bee's hum, rolled in as before.

" While he remained, his face changing, shouts and hurrahs came from somewhere in the direction of the river.

" ' Ah—yes, the Remembrance games,' he murmured. ' And I here. And Sue defiled.' "

So Jude dies while the world shouts outside for mad joy.

" The hurrahs were repeated, drowning the faint organ notes. Jude's face changed more ; he whispered slowly, his lips scarcely moving :

" ' Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.' "

Hardy is in a very dark mood. There is still no way out. The " President of the Immortals " has finished His sport with Jude. The " sport " with Tess was not satisfying enough, for the gods need much food that they may continue their genial sports.

END OF PART ONE

PART II

THE WRITER OF VERSE

CHAPTER ONE

"THE DYNASTS" (PART ONE)

To proceed from Mr. Hardy as a writer of prose to contemplate him as a writer of verse is a somewhat long journey. It is to see Hardy expressing his philosophy by means of a literary medium that can express philosophy better than in any other manner, and yet express it quite inaccurately. The writer of verse is much more likely to let imagination outweigh his judgment than the creator of prose. Verse is perhaps nearer the soul than prose, but the cold and calm conclusions of the intellect which so often form philosophy are often more accurately indicated by prose writing. It might then be expected, as an *a priori* assumption, that Hardy as a writer of verse would have a more inaccurate philosophy than Hardy employing the medium of prose. In other words, verse might be conceived to lead Hardy astray, whereas prose would keep him in his proper place. Whatever may be the truth of such a supposition, it will in no way apply to his vast work, his immense Epic Drama—"The Dynasts." For there is probably nothing more likely to curb an unruly imagination than sober history, and putting history into verse has no necessary conclusion of inaccurate history.

It may be as well to dispose of a possible objection to "The Dynasts" at once. That is the objection which asks petulantly whether it was at all necessary that Hardy should set the historical episodes of Nelson and Napoleon into verse.

The only answer to such an enquiry is one which asks in return whether the beautiful is ever unnecessary. For "The Dynasts" is a beautiful drama; it has that plenitude of drama and avoids the melodramatic that we should demand from a great artist. All I can hope to do in the three chapters that I can devote to a discussion of this great poem is to take a few and very miscellaneous passages and attempt to suggest what seems to be in the mind of Hardy when he wrote them, and whether they appear to fall in line with more prosaic interpretations of history.

Prose history is obviously more prosaic than verse history, but that is no reason for deducting a necessary difference in the essence of the historical facts dealt with. There is no particular reason why all history should not be written in verse, except the very good reason that most historians are not poets. For it has to be remembered that Mr. Hardy is not an historian; his task is to turn history written in prose into history written in verse, and to avoid a fallacious interpretation. How far he succeeds will perhaps be the main endeavour of these chapters to probe.

. . . . . .

There is a certain subtle mystical contention in the beginnings of "The Dynasts." It is a metaphysical suggestion that is quite lacking in much of Hardy's prose. It concerns the fact that spirits are unhampered by such conditions as time and space. Hardy has a very lofty conception of the way in which spirits are able to bridge over long periods of time. That they are slightly conceited about their abilities need not bring about any feelings of hostility. For we must surely, in the light of what knowledge we have of spirit matter, be content that these who are inhabitants of the spirit world should be possessed of

powers that are disallowed to finite material beings. Thus Hardy writes of this grand conception of the powers of spirits. And there seems to be little or no reason to imagine the idea but a poetic pose, apart from reality, adrift from science.

> " ' We'll close up Time, as a bird its van,
> We'll traverse Space, as spirits can,
> Link pulses severed by leagues and years
> Bring cradles into touch with biers.' "

This " sensible " idea seems to pervade the whole of " The Dynasts." Aided by spiritual beings, Hardy is able to get back into history, to probe into the minds of those who have made history. It is a little curious that his prose work should, in my opinion, leave out the spiritual. The idea again of guardianship and admonition possessed by the metaphysical beings in this epic poem is a fine one, and one that is not by any means far removed from conventional theories, culminating in the admirably sensible doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

It has become such a commonplace to insist that the true artist is careful of the smallest detail of his picture that the importance of the thing is often lost sight of. We are apt to forget that in painting a landscape it is as necessary to draw the ant with detail, as to lavish scrupulous care on the great mountain that overshadows the land over which the ant crawls. But—and it can never be insisted upon too often—Hardy is not only a great artist, he is a careful artist. It can be seen over and over again in his prose works. In his poetry Hardy is still the same careful student, quick to grasp a detail, zealous to place that detail in its entirety before those who will read. In " The Dynasts " Hardy

has caught the careless attitude of the British soldier with extreme skill. The British soldier, armed with a quip and a rifle, advancing to meet a deadly foe. The private soldier, combining a meagre intelligence with an aptitude for constructing verse summing up the essence of a situation. The soldier tramping along with a jog song, singing lustily, so that he may forget his bleeding feet, may forget the miles he has yet to tramp, may forget that at the end of his long journey death may await him and await him with the certainty he has little conception of. Thus Hardy shows the soldiery marching along, when it was thought that Napoleon, that dreaded genius, would soon be the foe it had to fight.

It is a splendid verse, and is a prototype of the immortal journey that was such a long, long way to Tipperary.

" ' We be the King's men, hale and hearty,
Marching to meet one Buonaparty,
If he be sea sick, says, ' No, no ! '
We shall have marched for nothing, O !
Right fol-lol ! ' "

For the old and the young soldiers will always be merry. Listen to the beat of the drums ; they cannot be silenced by the beat of the wings of death. Listen to the tramp of the feet ; they will not falter, even if they are marching to meet the little corporal from Corsica. Listen to the songs of the soldiery ; they will sing, even though so soon the cannons shall drown their merry singing.

" ' We be the King's men, hale and hearty,
Marching to meet one Buona party,
Never mind, mates ; we'll be merry, though
We may have marched for nothing, O !
Right fol-lol ! ' "

Away into the distance, just over the hill, and the singing dies away. Hardy has indeed understood the men who march, the men who sing, the men who care nothing for Napoleon and only a little for bleeding feet.

In the first part of " The Dynasts-" probably that which is not the least interesting- is the character attributed to Napoleon by Mr. Hardy. From what we know of Napoleon, from what history can tell us, there seems to be no reason to suggest that the Hardy inferences are either exaggerated or unhistorical. It is a merit in great contrast to Mr. Shaw, whose caricature of Napoleon in " The Man of Destiny " appears to have somewhat scant history read into it. And this is so even if we allow that Mr. Shaw could not be expected to be so ordinary as to believe that any history could possibly be true.

A tremendous amount of energy has been expended on the futile task of deciding whether Napoleon was callous and ambitious or merely one of those great men determined to win what he wanted at all costs. No agreement as to the matter can expect to be arrived at for the very good reason that the callousness of Napoleon is really an ethical question about which no two people will ever agree. I mean is it ethically unsound for a great soldier to win at whatever sacrifice to his troops, or is it more ethically sound for him to make of less account his military talents and so spare the lives of soldiers ? Any dogmatic answer to such a problem is futile.

There is a more subtle consideration about Napoleon, which concerns not so much his ambition as his pride. For pride is a more lofty condition than ambition, being a consciousness of the necessary right use of talents, while ambition is more unscrupulous in its determination to secure advancement at any price.

With very great perception Hardy brings out something which shows that the pride of Napoleon should be very carefully considered. For the pride that this arch military genius felt about himself was no petty conceit, no small-minded self-complacency, but a very certain belief that God had been very good to him ; that He had lavished upon him especial gifts ; that He had chosen him out from among millions to be one whose brow was of thunder, whose brain was as a two-edged sword ; whose pride was in no small measure a feeling that he was very much the special interest of the Deity.

It is a vastly different thing from the mad ambition of Napoleon that culminated in the Moscow débacle. It is almost a spiritual pride that Hardy attributes to Napoleon when he writes of him crowning himself in the magnificent cathedral that looks down on the vast city of Milan.

> " ' 'Tis God has given it to me. So be it.
> Let any who shall touch it now beware.' "

And then by a master stroke Hardy uses imagination. Delving into the intricate realms of the metaphysical, he makes the Spirit of the Pities whisper a warning into the ear of Napoleon. For God, who gives that men may feel a right Pride, has no sympathy when that Pride becomes unchecked and threatens to forget from whence it owes its very being.

> " ' Lieutenant Bonaparte,
> Would it not seemlier be to shut thy heart
> To these unhealthy splendours ? helmet thee,
> For her thou swar'st to first, fair Liberty ? ' "

But Napoleon will take no notice. He knows it is but a

mad fancy, a sign of overwork. So, when spiritual things come to us. They pass by, they are not real, we are merely overstrained and therefore receptive to influences that are merely internal. At the same time there is an uncomfortable feeling that something very external to us has brushed its presence against us ; the still small voice will not be silenced though we look quickly the other way—that wall has writing on it, and we dare not read, lest we read only too well that which we have no wish to read.

> " ' Such harsh utterance was not thine,
> It was aggressive Fancy, working spells
> Upon a mind o'erwrought ! ' "

It is then quite clear that Hardy attributes a kind of spiritual pride to Napoleon ; almost that Napoleon feels responsible to God for the great talents He has bestowed upon him, yet by means of an imaginative being Hardy demonstrates how the pride of Napoleon is transvaluing itself into a material ambition—and the spirit in a noble attempt endeavours to warn and deter this colossal genius. Hardy is a little pessimistic, again, even a great man like Napoleon is not master of himself. It is Hardy getting back, rather vaguely perhaps, to the melancholy of his prose.

Somewhat later in the first part of this poem Hardy conceives of Napoleon in another mood. This time it is Napoleon the military man—ambitious, full of the lust of conquest, severe and uncompromising with any of his subordinates who do not carry out his military plans to the letter.

It is the unreasonable Napoleon, utterly forgetful of the spirits' warning. Hardy follows up the mentality of Bonaparte with extreme pertinacity.

" ' What !—Is, then,
My scheme of years to be disdained and dashed
By this man's like, a wretched moral coward,
Whom you must needs foist on me as one fit
For full command in pregnant enterprise ! ' "

Nothing must stand in Napoleon's way, and any general or admiral who fails has to go and to go quickly. For now Napoleon has but one wish, and Hardy does not spare him.

" ' My brain has only one wish—to succeed.' "

Gone is the spiritual pride ; gone is the feeling of responsibility to God. Ambition has scarred Napoleon ; he must climb and climb—nothing matters but military success, the stench of invasion, the cataclysm of conquered countries, soldiers—what are soldiers ? Pawns in the fight for military world domination, pawns to make Napoleon the world conqueror, the man the like of whom the world had never before seen. It is all rather dreadful, for Hardy is quietly beginning to narrate the failure of Napoleon. In the distance, faint like a rising moon, shines forth the dreaded island of St. Helena.

. . . . . .

In dealing with such a mass of material as is contained in Part One of " The Dynasts," in the limited space of a chapter, it is essential to indulge in the rather unsatisfactory art of selection. Having attempted to say something of Mr. Hardy's attitude to Napoleon, it possibly logically follows that something may be said of his creating of Nelson. Quite generally speaking the same fair-mindedness and accuracy given to the study of Napoleon, in my opinion, manifests itself in the portrait of Lord Nelson.

Once again Hardy does not allow the liberty of poetry to carry him into anything approaching license. The historical character of Nelson can easily be distinguished in the character of him presented by Mr. Hardy in " The Dynasts." It is as clear-cut as that presented of Napoleon.

There has always been a certain blot on the fame of Nelson occasioned by his unhappy domestic affairs. Hardy makes it quite apparent that no one was more unhappy about it than Lord Nelson himself. In fact, it gives the famous English admiral a feeling of failure. The verse describing this emotion is written with restraint, and yet gives no sense of being at all undecided.

Nelson is speaking with Collingwood, who has reproached his beloved chief for harbouring gloomy and foreboding thoughts concerning the future.

> " ' Ah, Coll, lead bullets are not all that wound—
> I have a feeling here of dying fires,
> A sense of strong and deep unworded censure,
> Which, compassing about my private life,
> Makes all my public service lustreless.
> In my own eyes . . . . I fear I am much condemned.' "

There is in this premonition of a coming end to his mortal existence something of that warning which so often seems to strike men when they think deeply and with a sense of failure of their domestic unhappinesses and the attempted remedy which never really quite satisfies. So Nelson expresses his willingness ; nay, rather, his wish that he may die, for the world holds but little for him, who has defied one of its most persistent conventions.

> " ' Smiling I'd pass to my long home to-morrow,
> Could I with honour, and my country's gain.' "

The death of Nelson, one of those rare historical events which time does not in any way dim, has allowed Hardy to write some of the best lines in "The Dynasts." They are evolved with a sense of the fact that drama does not need dramatic rendering; given a chance, it can render its own drama. Hardy lets the death of Nelson be its own drama, though the drama is admirably expressed.

The remarkable friendship that Nelson had for Hardy is expressed by a simple but moving verse.

> " ' So many lives—in such a glorious cause . . . .
> I join them soon, soon, soon !—O where is Hardy ?
> Will nobody bring Hardy to me—none ?
> He must be killed—too. Surely Hardy's dead ? ' "

A little further on Hardy pens a remarkable two lines in which Nelson remarks on the tangible coming of death, the gradual obscuring of the material world. It is a profound idea that death should be something like a sandstorm smothering all the senses, blocking the ears, choking the eyes—all suggested by the symbolic word dust.

> " ' No ; it is not that dust ; 'tis dust of death
> That darkens me.' "

These two lines indicate in no small measure the power of description that Hardy possesses. The character of Nelson is again brought out a little after, when the great admiral learns of the death of the man who fired the fatal bullet at him. It is almost a natural law of great men that they forgive their enemies; it is one of the precepts of Christ that

has found more acceptance through history than any other, and it has also been one of the hardest of His injunctions.

There is great beauty about the verse radiating something of the beauty of the inmost soul of Lord Nelson.

" ' 'Twas not worth while !—He was, no doubt, a man
Who in simplicity and sheer good faith
Strove but to serve his country. Rest be to him !
And may his wife, his friends, his little ones,
If such he had, be tided through their loss,
And soothed amid the sorrow brought by me. ' "

There is also indicated in this something of the imagination of Nelson, who can see in the man who shot him, not only a mere enemy fighting his fleet, but a man, a husband, possibly a father. He can see the little desolate home, the chair in which the soldier will sit no more, and all the time Nelson feels himself responsible. Yet the responsibility rests not with him, but with the mad fools who have throughout history, in all nations, made war. Theirs is the responsibility, theirs is the crime, those fools who made war when the world was young and those fools who make and plan war in the very days in which we now live.

Nelson's dying request that Lady Hamilton be well looked after is put into a simple line of poetry. How well the promise was kept merely indicates the callous forgetfulness which England so often accords her greatest men.

" ' And take care of her, as you care for me.' "

And so the mortal end of Nelson ends on a dignified line. Hardy has studiously avoided making any dramatic effect out of the sombre scene.

"'My anchoring's elsewhere ordered! . . . Kiss me, Hardy.'"

Thus do men kiss, only at the last, so that a memory be left behind and perchance one taken to the next world.

CHAPTER TWO

"THE DYNASTS" (PART TWO)

THE second part of "The Dynasts" is a magnificent piece of work. There is, I think, a certain superiority to the first. Without in any way infringing on the findings of history, Hardy is less restrained, his poetry ascends to even greater heights, and he probes deeper down into the minds of the people he is writing of.

In the very first verses of this second part Hardy contrives with great skill to depict an English statesman dealing with the mean and sordid mind possessed by a potential assassin. Thus there is Gevrillière proposing to rid the world of Napoleon by the foul instrument of assassination. The scorn with which Fox greets the outrageous proposal is written with fine understanding.

> "'Sir, your unconscienced hardihood confounds me,
> And your mind's measure of my character
> Insults it sorely.'"

Then Fox proceeds to show his amazement that he has been led to have any conversation with a vulgar cut-throat, quite obviously ready to assassinate any one with the nonchalance of a Judas Iscariot.

> "'By your late sent lines
> Of specious import; by your bland address,
> I have been led to prattle hopefully
> With a cut-throat confessed!'"

Again, a little further on Hardy writes with extreme clearness in the pathetic lines when Fox begins to wonder if the time of his statesmanship is not drawing somewhere near its close. So marked are the signals ; at first we see the signal as white, then—can it be that our eyes deceived us ?—green ; then—this time there is no mistake—the signal is deep red.

> " ' Time signals that he draws,
> Towards the twelfth stroke of my working day !
> I fear old England soon must voice her speech
> With Europe through another mouth than mine.' "

I have suggested that in this second part Hardy probes deeply down into the minds of those he writes of. I mean in the two following lines, when we get a glimpse of Fox, not the statesman, but the overworked, tired man, looking eagerly forward to a holiday, looking forward to the days that will free him for a little from the burden of office, looking forward to the days when he will be able to be as other men ; at liberty, perchance, to watch the sun, the moon, the stars ; to hear the soft note of the birds, to witness the sweet bloom of the summer flowers.

> " ' How I shall love my summer holiday,
> At pleasant Saint-Ann's Hill ! ' "

If there is one principal theme that runs through " The Dynasts " it is in reality a study of Napoleon. He is the central figure, and it is therefore expedient in this chapter and in the next to spend a greater part of my space in discussing the Hardy portrait of him. I have already suggested he shows him to be possessed of something that may

be called spiritual pride, and on the other hand, very much threatened by his lust for power.

In the battle of Jena, so graphically described by Hardy, we have the essential military Napoleon, the marvellous general in the midst of battle ; we have his calm words when his troops are to be subjected to the violent impact of the hostile cavalry. We can almost hear the thunder of the hoofs, see the flash of the sabres, hear the hurried breathings of excited men and excited animals ; we can almost hear the cold words of Napoleon.

> " ' Keep you good guard against their cavalry,
> In past repute the formidablest known,
> And such it may be now ; so asks our heed.
> Receive it, then, in square, unflinchingly—
> Remember, men, last year you captured Ulm,
> So make no doubt that you will vanquish these.' "

There is all the certain optimism of Napoleon ; his message of trust in his troops ; his certainty that they will win. Hardy brings out all these well-known and authenticated characteristics of the Corsican general.

Yet Hardy brings out so well how the troops are warned against too much enthusiasm for their leader. They must employ a lively caution, be men of discretion, for they fight for a man who tempers enthusiasm with discretion, who abhors any kind of futile rashness.

> " ' Nay, caution, men ! 'Tis mine to time your deeds
> By light of long experience : yours to do them.' "

At this particular juncture it is as well to insist that " The Dynasts " shows Hardy to be a master of thorough-

ness. Thus, as I have already attempted to show, he deals with all sides of his characters. It is the artist careful for all the details of his picture and not only that, determined to get as much detail on the canvas as possible. There is Fox, eagerly looking forward to his holiday, and then, with the same infinite care and tact—the drawing of Napoleon in the very forefront of the fierce battle of Jena. Nelson is shown careless for his own life and then when that life is ebbing from him, calm and confident and full of the most exquisite Christian charity.

Hardy is just as scrupulous about the smaller details of his poem as the larger events. It is a parallel characteristic to that displayed in all his prose. It is the reasonable curbing of imagination so that it strays not beyond the reason of Realism.

Very vividly Hardy portrays something of the horror of a battle, when a straggler describes how the Duke of Brunswick has been killed by a grape shot. It is true realism without any hint of exaggeration.

> " '. . . . I saw this much :
> The Duke of Brunswick, spurring on to head
> His charging grenadiers, received in the face
> A grape shot stroke that gouged out half of it,
> Proclaiming then and there his life fordone.' "

While there is dire horror about this grim description, here is nothing that savours of the melodramatic. It is a reasonable picture of the sudden death that stalks about a battle, the instant shattering of a life, the instant death that strikes the private soldier or the general, the havoc a cannon ball can achieve. There is, even, if we can use the word in the sense that Hardy uses the right construction, something

even " picturesque " about the rendering. A cannon ball or a grape shot is the kind of thing that would " gouge " out the half of a man's face. It would strike and tear away like a shovel ; it would with a strange freak shatter half a face and leave the other half quite intact, but dead !

The violent hatred that Napoleon had for England is well shown when Hardy puts into some telling lines the plans that Bonaparte has for the coming conquest of England. It is a little interesting to note that the present Kaiser used much the same threats.

" ' All England's ports to suffer strict blockade,
All traffic with that land to cease forthwith,
All natives of her isles, wherever met,
To be detained as windfalls of the war.
All chattels of her make, material, mould,
To be good prize wherever pounced upon ;
And never a bottom hailing from her shores,
But shall be barred from every haven here,
This for her monstrous harms to human rights,
And shameless sauciness to neighbour powers ! ' "

So Mr. Hardy agrees that Napoleon looked upon England not only as something worthy of conquest, but something, that for the sake of the safety of neighbouring powers, ought to be vanquished. Again, the arrogance of Napoleon is not, in my opinion, by this verse thought by Hardy to be entirely personal. It is a throw back almost, as it were, to the mentality of Napoleon, when he felt the spiritual pride in the cathedral of Milan.

So far I have not mentioned a vague and rather accidental humour that almost forces its way at times into " The Dynasts." Now and again Hardy, almost reluctantly,

allows us to see something of the ready wit of Napoleon. A good example is when Napoleon is in conversation with the Tsar of Russia and His Imperial Majesty advises that Austria be called in to help. The reply of Napoleon to this rather futile advice is a piece of nimble wit that is well reproduced by Hardy.

" ' Two in a bed I have slept, but never three.' "

If pedants consider this coarse, they will be right, but they need not worry, as realism and truth are not seldom coarse, truth by its very nature being human and therefore often the reverse of delicate !

A passionate regard for truth is as much a necessity for Thomas Hardy as milk is for a new-born and squawking infant.

If a great man considers himself to be all sufficing, he is a fool and likely to be confounded. But if a great man allows himself to be served by an unscrupulous but brilliant adviser, he is a genius. Napoleon probably found in his minister—Talleyrand—just that curb and restraint which he most needed. When Napoleon is likely to fall into the trap that besets all men, great or small—I mean the trap of being fascinated by women—Talleyrand just measures up the folly of the whole thing. Hardy puts a diplomatic and true saying into his mouth ; it is a subtle diplomatic gesture, conceived by the cunning and cleverness which so often form the mental equipment of high diplomatic officials.

" ' Sire, is it possible that you can bend
To let one woman's fairness filch from you
All the resplendent fortune that attends
The grandest victory of your grand career ? ' "

Hardy proceeds to write some admirable dialogue between the Queen and Talleyrand. For the Queen is, like all women, full of hatred for the man who is able to see into the treachery and deceit of her mind. The battle of camouflaged courtesy, the clash of diplomatic dislikes, the sense of court courtesy are brilliantly indicated by Mr. Hardy.

The Queen observes the Talleyrand admonition which he whispers into the rather unwilling ear of Napoleon—

> " ' I should infer, dear Monsieur Talleyrand,
> Only two persons in the world regret
> My having come to Tilsit ? ' "

To which Talleyrand, well knowing who they are, professes a childlike innocence.

> " ' Madame, two ?
> Can any !—Who may such sad rascals be ? ' "

Then the Queen answers, this time with absolute frankness,

> " You and myself, Prince. Yes ! myself and you."

That there was some need for the warning by Talleyrand is evident. Hardy shows the " weak " Napoleon, nearly beaten by a woman. For, after all, only one great man has never even been interested in a woman, and that was Christ. It would probably be impossible to find any other through history who has not been under the influence, good or bad, of some woman, the worth of whom in many cases has proved to be negligible.

> " ' My God, it was touch and go that time, Talleyrand !
> She was within an ace of getting over me. As she stepped

into the carriage she said in her pretty way—' O, I have been cruelly deceived by you.'

" ' Ha, ha, well, a miss is as good as a mile.' "

So Napoleon gets back to his old fierce ambitious self. The sweet simplicity of a woman's eyes, the magnetism of her mouth having nearly trapped the Emperor—but not quite.

Hardy traces the sudden changes in Napoleon's mentality with great care, with keen perception, he shows his mind to be swayed now and then, but much too temporarily for his enemies and flatterers to gain what they want.

> " ' Adhere, then, to the treaty as it stands ;
> Change not therein a single article,
> But write it fair forthwith.' "
>
> . . . . . .

In the second part of " The Dynasts " one of the most illuminating episodes is the strangely tragic and yet human love story between Josephine and Napoleon. The ghastly tragedy of the end, the cruel inevitability of such a termination, the distressing mixture of frustrated nature and State requirements, are dealt with by Mr. Hardy with courtesy and keen insight. This episode is undoubtedly not the least fascinating subject dealt with in " The Dynasts." It is the great Napoleon, the man, the disappointed husband, perhaps cruel, perhaps not cruel, but utterly uncompromising —how often is cold uncompromise mistaken for cruelty—those who violently attack the Emperor may remember that often sentiment is a most deplorable vice and one to be rejected with the utmost severity.

As far as I am able I shall trace something of this painful historical episode as Hardy deals with it.

The very first line that Josephine utters is full of intense drama. It is the frightened cry of a woman who sees, not only an end, but a beginning. The end of her reign and the beginning of the reign of a hated rival.

"'I see my doom, my friend, upon your face.'"

To which Napoleon replies in a temporising manner. He does not wish to deliver the blow with full force at the first onslaught; he has it not in him that he shall see the face of Josephine white with fear or thrown suddenly into the look of an old woman. The shock must be more gradual. So Napoleon pretends. Hardy knows so well how this magnificent soldier would not, at first, hurt Josephine with too deadly a thrust.

"'You seem bored by Cambacères ball.'"

But Josephine has no illusions. If men cannot see through Napoleon, save perchance the eagle eye of Talleyrand, the eyes of a woman can see only too well. Her doom is reflected in the Napoleonic temporising. Napoleon is not bored by the ball; he is unutterably bored by her! Josephine's reply is a pathetic one. A miserable attempt to stave off the inevitable, something in the way that we fight and fight, and only retreat inch by inch, until with a despairing gasp the end comes and comes greedily, and demanding to be satiated for having been kept waiting so long.

"'It means divorce!—a thing more terrible
Than carrying elsewhere the dalliances
That formerly were mine. I kicked at that;
But now agree, as I for long have done,
To any infidelities of act.
May I be yours in name.'"

An agony of pleading in such a request, but if it is addressed to Napoleon it is addressed to the wrong man. It is not really Napoleon shuffling out of a responsibility ; it is once again the Napoleon full of pride—not spiritual pride this time, but pride of State. Hardy is surely most fair to Napoleon.

" 'My mind must bend
To other things than our domestic pettings ;
The Empire orbs above our happiness,
And 'tis the Empire dictates this divorce.' "

If opinion is very sharply divided as to the sincerity of this last statement, Hardy seems to be on Napoleon's side. It is one of the most difficult things in the world to detach a man from his responsibility to the State ; it is indeed so difficult that selfishness may be suggested when, after all, the man, Emperor though he may be, is only acting for the good of the Empire over which he presides. It does seem fairer to call the divorce an Empire divorce engineered by needs of the Empire, rather than a Napoleonic whim of cold heartlessness.

With extraordinary skill Hardy depicts the absolute difference in outlook between Napoleon and Josephine. On the one hand, as I have indicated, Hardy shows the Emperor putting before any other consideration the welfare of the State. On the other hand, in the verse which I quote below we have the personal aspect of Josephine ; her worry that she is losing her husband by the coming divorce. It is sorrowful humanity, the same whether it be Empress or the meanest peasant woman in her kingdom.

" 'But are you really going to part from me ?

O, no, no, my dear husband ; no, in truth,
It cannot be my Love will serve me so ! ' "

But it is all so hopeless. Josephine may well despair ; the die is cast, the princess chosen. And, worst of all, Napoleon angry !

" ' I tell you, dear,
The thing's decreed, and even the princess chosen.' "

Then we are enlightened by a little feminine jealousy—the fact that women very seldom can hear of a rival without harbouring mean and petty thoughts, especially when they have cleverly selected the woman who is not the capturer of their late husband ! The pettiness of Josephine at this stage is delightfully conceived by Hardy.

" ' She's young ; but no great beauty ! Yes, I see
Her silly, soulless eyes and horrid hair ;
In which new gauderies you'll forget me ! ' "

It does not take Napoleon long to come to the point. Perhaps he scents that Josephine might make him weak ; therefore it has all been settled in advance. Mr. Hardy is very careful to impress upon us the thoroughness of Bonaparte in this unfortunate affair.

" ' The severing parchments will be signed by us
Upon the fifteenth, prompt.' "

Once again Josephine resorts to passionate pleading, and the Hardy verse is a true replica of a miserable woman staking almost her last throw in an attempt to raise pity in the

breast of one who could have but very seldom experienced the devastating emotion.

> " ' So far advanced, so far !
> Fixed ? for the fifteenth ? O, I do implore you,
> My very dear one, by our old, old love,
> By my devotion, don't, don't cast me off
> Now, after these long years ! ' "

Once more Napoleon repeats that the divorce is formal ; as if divorce is ever formal to a woman, seeing that she is dubbed a failure by the very fact of its employing.

> " ' Heavens, how you jade me !
> Must I repeat that I don't cast you off ;
> We merely formally arrange divorce—
> We live and love, but call ourselves divided. ' "

For the moment Josephine is persuaded by this seemingly moderately satisfactory position.

> " ' Very well. Let it be. I must submit.' "

It is after this that Napoleon, if he is at all brutal, may be defined as coming under the meaning of that word. So far Hardy has depicted him as patient with a rather irritating woman, if not a stupid one.

The end of this distressing episode comes on a tragic verse, that most tragic of all themes, love rejected because it is not reciprocated love, but one-sided, evoking no response, beating upon a fast shut door, beating and receiving no reply, so that at length exhausted, it cries out in agony and falls into unconsciousness.

Hardy brings out the agony of Josephine with all his force It is Gethsemane, and we are not spared.

> " ' O my dear husband—do not make me—don't .
> If you but cared for me—the hundredth part
> Of how I care for you, you could not be
> So cruel as to lay this torture on me.
> It hurts me so !—it cuts me like a sword.
> Don't make me, dear ! Don't, will you ? O, O, O ! ' "

It is indeed a bitter note, and one that is really the culminating point in this second part. It is, in a sense, the beginning of the end of Napoleon.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE DYNASTS" (PART THREE)

THERE is a feeling of melancholy all through the third part of "The Dynasts," rising at times to a pitch of loud and clamouring misery. Nothing in history is more gloomy than the end of Napoleon, for it is not only the finish of a remarkable man, it is the end of a soul.

Hardy begins this third part on a dramatic note, which, at the same time, is not in any way made drama. The question of portents is quite a practical one, and too many men have experienced them to allow utter discrediting to be their reward. We are again with Hardy when he writes metaphysically, demanding that the spiritual can be very intimately linked to the physical. Thus, the Spirit of the Years warns Napoleon, whose horse has been so indiscreet as to stumble.

> " 'The portent is an ill one, Emperor ;
> An ancient Roman would retire thereat ! ' "

The words have a nasty effect on Napoleon, for though their origin is not apparent their import cannot be insolently disregarded.

> " 'Whose voice was that, jarring upon my thought
> So insolently ? ' "

Out of the mass of material which constitutes the third part of " The Dynasts," it is far from easy to determine which " incidents " best illustrate the various Hardy methods of dealing with vastly different events. I have, after careful consideration, come to the conclusion that it might be interesting, at least, if I dealt with the picture of the Duke of Wellington, some of the events in the Retreat from Moscow, and some of the lines that deal with the Battle of Waterloo.

There is a daring little cameo of Wellington in the midst of battle—the uncompromising general, rather impatient and probably a little unfair.

> " ' Blast him, he's disobeyed his orders, then !
> How happened this ? How long has it been known ? ' "

The simple words " blast him " denote Hardy to be very careful to try and get the whole of the character of a great soldier. A lesser artist might easily have left out this rather gentle oath and been quite unaware that he was also leaving out an integral part of the man he was " painting." This scrupulous care that Hardy lavishes on his work is probably in no small measure the reason of the greatness of much of it. Yet again it is the pen of Hardy sweeping like a scythe and leaving nothing not mown down, no characteristic hid, a very courageous attempt to nullify any suggestion of a mere part portrait.

Then there is the rather incredible story of the officer's wife who followed her husband into battle only to find his lifeless body all bloody before her. Wellington, who always disliked women anywhere in the war zone, is truly portrayed in this sentiment by Hardy.

" ' Well, I'm damned sorry for her. Though I wish
The women-folk would keep them to the rear :
Much awkwardness attends their pottering round ! ' "

Both in battle and in peace women cause much trouble in pottering around, but it is a very blissful and much desired trouble !

That Wellington thoroughly disliked certain types of women is well brought out in a verse by Hardy that is very strongly reminiscent of Mr. Kipling. Wellington is exclaiming at the number of women camp followers.

" ' Well, pack them off
To-morrow to Pamplona, as you can ;
We've neither list nor leisure for their charms.' "

After which Wellington somewhat crudely expresses himself and his own personal feelings.

" ' By God, I never saw so many whores
In all my life before ! ' "

A true verse of sincere Hardy realism.

Perhaps one of the most ghastly catastrophes that has occurred in military history is the Retreat from Moscow. Such a subject would have a special appeal to the mind of Hardy—a mind full of the gloom of life ; a mind able to express that gloom in a way achieved by no other writer of this twentieth century.

It is to be expected, then, that this sombre theme would allow the plenitude of power to Mr. Hardy. It might also be expected, and expected quite reasonably, that in such a medium as verse to express such a gamut of gloom as the

Retreat, license might be indulged in. I do not believe that license has been indulged in. Imagination could not conceivably outstep the grim realism of a retreat by a starved army through the awful vastnesses of Russia. Imagination can scarcely express the agony of that crucifying march. Imagination is but a poor weapon with which to attack the gigantic task of conveying something of the appalling *débâcle* of that ill-fated expedition. Probably, as in most other " incidents," Hardy brilliantly harmonises imagination with realism ; realism with the conclusions of history. That Hardy writes of this Retreat almost as if he enjoys it, is not to be wondered at, when we ponder over the sum of the impressions of his mind, as displayed in his prose works. His joy is not devoid of pity ; it is a fierce joy, not *because* of the Retreat, but of the fact that the Retreat allows him so much that his pen would greedily devour.

One of the most tragic lines that Hardy opens the story of the terrible Moscow tragedy is uttered by the weird creation which he designates Spirit Ironic. This strange and yet foreseeing being beholds the joy of Napoleon at the sight of the steeples of Moscow city. But the spirit knows full well the joy will not be sustained very long.

" ' An anti-climax to Napoleon's dream.' "

And more, the most frightful disaster that ever occurred to Napoleon, far worse than his second Waterloo !

The drama moves on steadily ; the obstinacy of Napoleon is apparent. He will not be beaten by the barbarous Russians, the flames—let them burn and illumine brightly, the great French army, the pride of France, the flower of Europe, to be driven out by a pack of snarling Russians—that is not the method that appeals to a potential world conqueror.

" ' What I have won I disincline to cede ! ' "

Then something of another side of Napoleon. The quick decision ; if not Moscow, then St. Petersburg. It is that sudden decision which is so fatal an attribute of great minds ; the sudden leap to the finality of an ambition with no thought of the road leading there, which is pondered over by men of a meaner brain, but a more cautious enterprise.

" ' Outwitted here, we'll march on Petersburg.
The devil if we won't ! ' "

Looking back upon smoking Moscow, Napoleon utters something of a lament. Something of the lament that it is the vague beginning of a series of disasters. So—as we look back on the smoking remains of all that we had planned to do—all, all, nothing but a miserable cinder heap. It is a pathetic lament, for Moscow even to-day is still the bewildering enemy of all the best that humanity offers.

" ' I fear that this event
Marks the beginning of a train of ills—
Moscow was meant to be my rest,
My refuge—and—it vanishes away.' "

At the terrible disaster at the Bridge of Beresina the French army is thrown down into the river as though the river demanded a full meal of French food ! This frightful disaster allows Hardy to pen a magnificent verse concerning the unconquerable determination of mother love. It is a parallel to Mr. Kipling when he writes his exquisite " Mother of Mine."

"'Then women are seen in the waterflow—limply
bearing their infants between wizened white arms
stretching above;
Yea, motherhood, sheerly sublime in her last despairing,
and lighting her darkest declension with limitless
love.'"

So the whole miserable host goes to where

"Souls passed to where History pens no page."

In his many admirable pleas for history as related by the common man, Mr. Chesterton has done nothing that is more worthy of keen acceptance. We want to know in an event like the Retreat from Moscow what the private soldier thought about it. It is of course pretty certain that our curiosity will not be satisfied. But then we shall be insistent and demand that an imaginative writer with a great *flair* for history shall tell us what he thought the private soldier would have thought about this Retreat. What he thought of the awful tramp, tramp; what he thought of death hovering nearby and gibbering at him; what he thought of sucking the blood from his own fingers; what he thought of knowing that if he fell he would rise no more; that the snow would be his coffin; that the snow would be his mantle; that if he were dug out it would be to be the food of his starving companions, who would gobble him up as they gazed at his flesh with mad hunger in their eyes.

Hardy gives us a pretty good idea. And it is when the French soldiery learn that Napoleon has left them. The dialogue is realistic and sincere.

"'What—gone do you say? Gone?

He left us at Smorgoni hours ago.
The Sacred Squadron even he has left behind ;
By this time he's at Warsaw or beyond,
Full pace for Paris."

Gone ? How did he go ?
No, surely ! He could not desert us so.' "

Thus the conversation goes on—until it becomes something more. Listen, what is that ? It is soldiers singing—mad soldiers singing, mad soldiers singing in the cold insolent snow, mad soldiers singing ere the breath shall be driven from their bodies. Mad soldiers singing, for they have not had food, mad soldiers singing, for they have not had drink, mad soldiers singing, for they have not had meat.

" ' Ha, for the snow and hoar !
Ho—for our fortune's made.
We can shape our bed without sheets to spread,
And our graves without a spade ;
So foolisn life adieu,
And ingrate Leader too.
—Ah, but we loved you true,
Yet—he, he, he ! and ho, ho, ho !
We'll never return to you.' "

These few lines possibly indicate in some way the restrained yet dramatic way in which Hardy deals with this great Retreat. The song of the mad soldiers, the anger of Napoleon, the wonder of the everlasting unselfishness of mother love. Each is carefully conceived, each is used effectively, but without striving for effect.

. . . . . .

Not so very long ago it fell to my lot to visit the Field of Waterloo. The tourists who accompanied me laughed at the fine holiday they were enjoying ; they looked forward eagerly to the *estaminet* in which they might drink Grenadine and eat cakes which would keep them satisfied until groaning motor-cars took them back to the city of Brussels.

Over the Battlefield of Waterloo shone the sun with a grand splendour. But I felt depressed, for on those fields that now looked smiling an English field marshal beat a soldier the like of which the world had never seen and has never seen since.

And the tourists didn't seem to care one bit ; they cared not that Wellington was dead ; they cared not that Napoleon was long since dust. Then all at once I felt more happy. The same sun which shone upon the Field of Waterloo had shined in the year that Napoleon was defeated. Perhaps even while I stood there it still shone for Wellington and Napoleon ; all over that vast country I seemed to see in the sky " Resurgamus—Resurgamus."

. . . . . .

Of the Battle of Waterloo everything that can be said about it has been said. It remains merely for Hardy to add something about it towards the end of his magnificent poem ; his great contribution to English literature. One or two quotations will be sufficient to show how he conceives that gigantic battle, the battle which has changed the world.

The battle is nearing its end. Napoleon has been unable to break the English.

" ' Life's curse begins, I see.' "

Though he is outwardly calm, the Emperor knows that his sun is setting—soon, soon it will be quite dark. The Spirit of the Pities knows only too well the iron man is beginning to quaver.

" ' The hour is shaking him, unshakable
As he may seem ! ' "

It is the end. The soldiery know it only too well. The Emperor's Old Guard is broken. Let us speak gently of them in the hour of their defeat, for they are brave soldiers.

" ' The Guard gives—we are beaten ! ' "

Napoleon's last lines in " The Dynasts " are the secret of his defeat.

" ' Saving always England's—
Rightly dost say ' well nigh.' Not England's—she
Whose tough, enisled, self-centred, kindless craft
Has tracked me, springed me, thumbed me by the throat,
And made herself the means of mangling me.' "

. . . . . .

Nelson, Wellington, Napoleon, they have gone where eyes cannot follow them ; they have gone where ears cannot hear them ; they have gone where love or hatred, slander or truth, has no effect.

Courteously, carefully has Mr. Hardy written of them. Nelson, Wellington, Napoleon—" The Dynasts " is their splendid and beautiful—In Memoriam.

CHAPTER FOUR

WESSEX AND ANYWHERE

It is interesting to observe that some of the poems in Mr. Hardy's volume of Wessex poems were written over sixty years ago. It is no small achievement for an author to be alive some sixty years after he has written mature poetry. Such a condition certainly disproves the fact that the gods love all good poets, or, at any rate, not all those whom the gods love die young!

It is instructive to notice in a very early poem that Mr. Hardy wrote ominous signs of the melancholy which was to distinguish all his work. It can be found in a rather simple little poem about the most dreadful tragedy in the universe—the death of love. There is a strong probability that in some manner the body will rise again, for there is a good deal to be said for the fact that the Apostles did not lie, but there is no such thing as love dead raising itself with a new body. Love, if it dies, leaves nothing to be resurrected; for nothing can be born out of dead love, not even attempted resuscitation of love. There is a sad little verse that Hardy writes about Amabel; she must have been so fair, she must have been so full of simplicity, and now

> "I said (the while I sighed
> That love like ours had died)
> 'Fond things I'll no more tell
> To Amabel.'"

For it is goodbye, and someone a little sadder, a little older, but not—oh, you foolish people who prattle so—a little wiser. We are never wiser for having lost love. If we are anything in the nature of acting with the intelligence over the catastrophe, it is that we are cynical, hard—but never, never wise.

> " ' But leave her to her fate,
> And fling across the gate,
> Till the Last Trump, farewell,
> O Amabel ! ' "

While there is something rather commonplace about this particular verse, something that cannot quite express itself, something that is possibly unsaid, the finality about the emotion conveyed by it, the suggestion of a remote reunion at the end of the world, are an early indication that Hardy meant his verse to convey much in a minimum of words. Also there is a decided callousness. The girl can be left to her own devices—but Hardy is not inevitably severe, she will have time to repent and perchance be converted before the great day when this world ends and we are all summoned to know in whole truth that what really matters is Eternity.

There is nothing more hard to define than inexpressible grief. Grief of such a nature is an internal madness that tears with long talons, and having torn, creates longer talons and begins to rend again. It cannot show itself in all its miserable intensity to the beholder; none can help it until it has somewhat spent itself, none can help. Such grief must be left alone, but it must not be left alone too long, lest it attempt to end itself by the miserable course of suicide.

Hardy brings out this kind of internal grief very clearly

in a verse depicting the sorrow of a woman at the funeral of her sweetheart. Do let us stop talking drivel about death ; it may not be an end, but it *looks* like an end. It may be that the soul has passed on to something more glorious, but we would much rather have the poor battered body. It may be that we are to be not as men without hope, but do let those who give such admirable advice pause and consider what it would mean to them when the coffin of all that they hold dear sinks into the earth. Do let us stop the Sunday School twaddle that the loved one is in Paradise. If it is Hell to us to have lost, why is it not also Hell to the dead person who has lost us ? But we shall get no answer, for there is no answer and platitudinarians hate to be questioned, lest their crass ignorance be utterly uprooted. Hardy in this verse entitled " She " proves the agonising regret for a death that neither Religion nor Non-Religion can do anything to assuage when the grief is at its climax.

" ' They bear him to his resting place—
In slow procession sweeping by ;
I follow at a stranger's pace ;
His kindred they, his sweetheart I.
Unchanged my gown of garish dye,
Though sable-clad is their attire ;
But they stand round with griefless eye,
Whilst my regret consumes like fire ! ' "

Once again a very simple verse, but Mr. Hardy's old theme—nothing happens as we had hoped.

" ' Upon a poet's page I wrote
Of old two letters of her name ;
Part seemed she of the effulgent thought

Whence that high singer's rapture came.
When now I turn the leaf the same
Immortal light illumes the lay,
But from the letters of her name
The radiance has died away ! ' "

The miracles that time works are indeed full of wonder, but they are equally full of misery and disillusion.

With Hardy in a more rollicking mood, we get back to his delightful soldier ditties that are so reminiscent of Mr. Kipling. Here is a delightful verse, once more about Napoleon, when he would march on London town—if he had not of course (Mr. Hardy does not say so) marched via Moscow and Waterloo.

" When lawyers strive to heal a breach,
And Parsons practise what they preach ;
Then Little Boney he'll pounce down,
And march his men on London town ! "

Mr. Hardy, in writing of soldiers in these Wessex poems, has much in common with Mr. Kipling. They both are able to get into the mind of the private soldier ; they can express his philosophy as he himself would utter it. They are able to infuse into these soldier poems something of that carelessness that marks the British soldier. Because the British soldier is not careless, because he has no cares, but because he is sensible enough to know that the less you think the less unendurable is war, long marches, vile food, lack of water, and the hundred and one things that go with the exciting condition of being on active service. I quote one more verse from the same poem—a neat little one—the philosophy of women by a sergeant. A much better

philosophy than that uttered by morality councils and rescue workers.

" When Husbands with their Wives agree,
And maids won't wed from modesty,
Then Little Boney he'll march down,
And march his men on London town ! "

. . . . . .

A curious little tragedy is dealt with in " The Dance at the Phœnix," where an elderly woman dances so much and so zealously that she dances herself to death. The ballad is written with a pleasant swing and with a sympathy for the woman, who wishes to be young again, who wishes once more to be the " hit " of the evening, who wishes once more to feel the thrill of the quick rhythm, experience once again the intoxication of the ballroom.

" The fire that late had burnt fell slack
When lone at last stood she ;
Her nine and fifty years came back,
She sank upon her knee
Beside the durn, and like a dart
A something arrowed through her heart
In shoots of agony."

A pathetic conclusion to a sad little romance, but the heart does not like romance when it has thumped for many years ; it gives up in despair—such overwork cannot be allowed.

In " Her Immortality " Hardy has written a very peculiar poem which has something of Spiritualism in it. There is the idea, perhaps not a false one, in which the sorrowful lover is able to think his dead love back again into actuality. Hardy makes this quite plain.

" ' I lay and thought ; and in a trance
She came and stood me by—
The same, even to the marvellous ray
That used to light her eye.' "

That the impulse to come is felt " on the other side " is also apparent enough. It is a mutual magnetism.

" ' You draw me, and I come to you
My faithful one,' she said
In voice that had the moving tone
It bore ere she was wed."

But there is something dangerous about it all. The dead lover can only come back and manifest while the living lover is still on the earth.

" ' In you resides my single power
Of sweet continuance here ;
On your fidelity I count
Through many a coming year.' "

The last verse denotes pessimism. The lover on this earth, when he ceases to be, will infect the spiritual lover with that ceasing also. There is no suggestion of a meeting beyond the veil.

" ' But grows my grief. When I surcease,
Through whom alone lives she,
Ceases my love, her words, her ways,
Never again to be ! ' "

This is a very bitter climax, and I believe quite improbable

In a rather plaintive verse Hardy writes of the misery that the unbeliever feels when he is so unfortunate as to be among a herd of believers, who chant their belief in some great cathedral where even God Himself must feel neglected!

" ' Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,
Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.' "

And it seems to have abided a mystery to Hardy all through his writings. It is a strange thing, belief, and seems to elude those for whom it would be the most harmonious consolation.

. . . . . .

In a poem entitled "At an Inn," Hardy is once again concerned with the problem of irony. Two "lovers" enter an inn and are received as lovers. The irony of it Hardy soon shows.

" ' As we seemed we were not
That day afar,
And now we seem not what
We aching are.
O severing sea and land,
O laws of men,
Ere death, once let us stand
As we stood then!' "

Hardly anything in life is more incredible, yet more fre-

quent, than the spectacle of those who were once lovers praying they might be in such condition again. When we are in love we cannot conceive how it can possibly cease; when it *has* ceased we cannot conceive how it ever could have existed at all. Hardy rather querulously complains that love has served this couple rather a bad turn, or is it that they have expected too much and given too little?

> " The kiss their zeal foretold,
> And now deemed come,
> Came not: within his hold
> Love lingered numb.
> Why cast he on our port
> A bloom not ours?
> Why shaped us for his sport
> In after hours? "

Sometimes Hardy is quite a psychologist. The effects of shock on persons are too intricate to be discussed here. It is sufficient to say that in his poem " The Slow Nature " Hardy is dealing with the psychological effect of shock. A woman hears that her husband has been gored to death by a bull; she hears that his mangled body is being brought back to her home. What does she do? Weep? No; she merely is most concerned to get busy about tidying up the bedroom, so that the poor corpse may rest in decent surroundings. But in spite of the woman's apparent fussiness when all good opinion demands she should be unrestrainedly weeping, she is broken-hearted. The last verse of this sombre poem is again a harping on that internal grief which can find no outlet until it saps and saps, until the broken-hearted person is as cold a corpse as the corpse that caused her heart to break.

" But a fortnight thence she could take no food
And she pined in a slow decay :
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
And laughed in his ancient way."

The run and ring of this poem are delightful, the pathos of it supreme, the psychology of it accurate.

I cannot perhaps better end this chapter dealing with some of the poems of Mr. Hardy than by visioning him in a satirical note.

Hardy is sick of the modernist clergy who attempt to say everything did not happen and in the place of this sum of negatives fail to insert one positive.

" Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing will I forswear,
And sit on Sundays in my chair
And read that moderate man Voltaire."

CHAPTER FIVE

SATIRES AND MISCELLANEOUS VERSES

NOTHING could be more likely to happen than that a realist should be a satirist. Mr. Hardy in his prose is essentially a realist. In his verse, with the exception of "The Dynasts," the satirical approach to realism is his very obvious vogue. In this chapter I hope to deal with a few of his miscellaneous verses and suggest whether the sentiments in them appear to be consistent with a writer who is acknowledged not only to be a realist but a thinker whose philosophy, though gloomy, has accuracy behind it. For we are so prone to forget that life is not all gloomy, and that it is not all gay. In dealing with a writer like Mr. Hardy it is most necessary, if we are to understand his point of view, to look upon life from a relative point of view, or perhaps endeavour to ascertain whether the particular incidents that he propounds are really in line with the satire he wants to show they represent.

In my opinion some of Mr. Hardy's satires are fair and do parallel that peculiar contradictory feeling between emotion and outward show of emotion; on the other hand, sometimes I believe Mr. Hardy satirises when there is no hidden motive there at all. Because surely satire deals with the hidden. There is a very simple little poem which deals with the wife who all unknown entertains to tea the woman her husband really loves. Here Mr. Hardy is dealing with the hidden, and he does so by satire. There is the

apparent outward scene of respectable married bliss and domestic well-being. All the pleasing accessories of a married home ; lift up the roof of any villa in any suburb and there it all is, quite undistinguished, quite unknown to the rest of the world.

> " The kettle descants in a cozy drone,
> And the young wife looks in her husband's face."

The outward scene. No apparent reason for satire. Why should the young couple be laughed at ? We all love the sound of the kettle nearly boiling ; it isn't the fire that really starts the kettle—love is the prime mover !

But here Mr. Hardy introduces his little satire. The happy young housewife who entertains the " other " woman all unawares.

> " And the happy young housewife does not know
> That the woman beside her was his first, his choice."

There is the satire, or is it irony ? Misery in the midst of happiness. The ridiculous trick of fate. But the young wife is happy, the pleaders for " all's right with the world " will say. Of course she is, while the husband and the other woman are desperately miserable. Happiness at the price of misery, and again, " God is in His Heaven." If so, Hardy propounds that many of His creations are in Hell !

The very next poem that Hardy writes is, in my opinion, an unfair satire. It suggests a certain amount of humbug on the part of a preacher. Many preachers do not carry out what they preach for the simple reason that *because* they cannot carry out their precepts they preach them so that their listeners may not fail so lamentably. The charge

against the preacher is that he is a man who merely preaches as a delicate pose. This kind of satire for a writer of the genius of Mr. Hardy appears to be a little cheap, a little inclined to spite, a little suggestive that Hardy is annoyed that any one believes anything!

The background is no doubt a trim church and a trim congregation.

> " ' And now to God the Father,' he ends,
> And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles."

Not, of course, because the preacher is pleased that God is a father—the most wonderful news in the world if it is true—but because the preacher is pleased that he is impressing the congregation; that they are listening to him much more than they are thinking about the Fatherhood of God. And yet I think perhaps Mr. Hardy is a little unfair in assuming this preacher to be but an actor. For a man might well be delighted that he could believe and make other people believe that God was a Father. Not so Mr. Hardy. The preacher is a bit of a fraud; he is probably too insignificant to realise the marvellous ascription he has just uttered. Back in the vestry, the real preacher, according to Hardy, can be discovered.

> " The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
> And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
> Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
> Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
> And re-enact at the vestry glass
> Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb show
> That had moved the congregation so."

The two poems from which I have quoted seem to me to

show Mr. Hardy as a satirist when he is fair and when he is unfair. Both poems deal with hidden motives and emotion ; the one has Realism behind it, the other may quite well be the spite of a rather gloomy Determinist philosopher.

. . . . . .

Sometimes Hardy is quite refreshingly modern! He can create something that might well be the rather daring song of a music hall artist. It is Hardy in the mood when his satire has nothing very heavy about it, but is cynicism relieved by a kind of sardonic chuckle. Thus he versifies of a couple sitting on any seaside esplanade. The pair are to be married, and the passer by laughs, perchance a little bitterly, to think that the embryo husband has no idea his embryo wife has been fondled by the " stranger " passing by them.

Hardy is in the state of the comedian who sings a ditty with a kind of catch refrain—well, it's life and life is a mix-up and we are a " long time dead," and in any case nobody knows, so what does it matter ? Whether it does really matter or not would merely be to get back to Hardy, gloomy again at the subtle ironies. For the moment he is almost tired of problems. These things are, they probably always will be.

" ' That smart proud pair,' says the man to his friend,
' Are to marry next week . . . . How little he thinks
That dozens of days and nights on end
I have stroked her neck, unhooked the links
Of her sleeve to get at her upper arm . . . .
Well, bliss is ignorance, what's the harm ! ' "

There is, of course, something a little deeper in this than the mere acquiescence in a certain little trick of life. It is

not only that we never really know the person who is to be most intimate with us, but that in many ways it seems as well that we are possessed of this ignorance. If the girl told her lover it would not wipe out what she had done; it might quite conceivably disillusion a man in the grip of the most holy emotion in the world—absolute love for a woman. And in any case, Hardy asks, "What's the harm!" A possible deceit perhaps. Anyhow, Mr. Hardy is not going to worry about this little problem; there are too many problems that drive us to a cold despair—problems that shut us in with high walls of dark doubt—the little indiscretions must solve themselves.

Quite possibly also Hardy in this verse is something of a teacher, rather kind. He seems to suggest that it is no good worrying about the past, no good upsetting present happiness by reverting to that which is over.

One of the most extraordinary of our many extraordinary traditions is the respect we pay to dead people. We spend all our money on flowers for them; we chant that death is a deliverance, that it is almost a blessing, and then we dress ourselves in black. We are perfectly certain that a dead person must be buried in a decent cemetery, quite forgetting that so soon the body will be merely mingled with the dust. Hardy writes rather a terrible poem about some mothers who quarrel about where their dead children are actually interred. The quarrel is a little superficial, as the exigencies of the practical life of a town have played havoc with the dead bodies.

> "And then the main drain had to cross,
> And we moved the lot some nights ago,
> And packed them away in the general foss
> With hundreds more. But their folks know . . . ."

And it is well they do not. Here is Hardy complaining that all this fuss about the last resting place of dead people is a little unnecessary, for no insult can affect a dead person, The main drain is far more important than hundreds of corpses. It may be that Hardy is writing a very subtle lesson in humility ; one day the main drain will move us from our last resting place.

And again, it doesn't really matter at all.

> " And as well cry over a new laid drain
> As anything else, to ease your pain."

If Hardy has a specialised sense of humour, it is of the kind that implies a warning. A verse that Hardy writes concerning the peculiar way in which a man learns that his future wife is not too sweet tempered is a strange mixture of humour and warning. The warning that marriage had better be avoided because of something seen—that was not meant to be seen. Mr. Hardy implies that it is just as well for a man to know a woman's soul before he decides to spend his life with her.

The lover has left his stick behind, and on going back sees through the window his promised wife quarrelling with her mother. The man decides to lose the stick and the girl !

" ' At last I behold her soul undraped ! '

> Thinks the man who had loved her more than himself ;
> ' My God !—'tis but narrowly I have escaped.
> My precious porcelain proves it delf.'
> His face has reddened like one ashamed,
> And he steals off, leaving his stick unclaimed."

Sadness creeps into this verse ; yet another disillusion, and

Hardy, once more quietly pessimistic, though veiling the sting of it in wise humour.

In another poem in this same series of satires, Hardy is in rather a savage mood. It is of a woman who orders black that she will wear when her husband dies. And the husband has overheard the order. The actual situation may be a little impossible and rather overdrawn. At the same time it is another warning. That we had better not be too sure that those we think nearest and dearest will mind our final exit so very much after all. Hardy is rather melancholy here, and it is another lesson in humility.

The man tells his wife that he saw her buying clothes that she shall wear when he has passed where he will have no cognizance of the wearer of them.

" ' You were viewing some lovely things. ' Soon required
For a widow of latest fashion ' ;
And I knew 'twould upset you to meet the man who had
to be cold and ashen
And screwed in a box before they could dress you
In the last new note in mourning,
As they defined it. So, not to distress you,
I left you to your adorning.' "

Here also Hardy seems to imply the tense drama that may be taking place in a commonplace draper's shop while the assistants merely are a little happy that they have effected a good sale. It is again a Hardy characteristic how the commonplace may be full of the most poignant drama.

I will quote from one more of these curious and melancholy satirical poems. Hardy is once again in a very ironic mood. When a person is dead, we find that we had given perhaps

no thought to them, and then—we find that it was the person we had really loved. Unconscious love, which is much more common than is supposed. It is then too late. The love which is now impelling us to gaze with a magnetized horror at a new grave is no good. The person is gone for ever. We may rush round the world, but the person will only be in the new-made grave ; we may tear our hair, the person will only be in the new-made grave ; we may cry, and cry so that the neighbours weep that we have become insane, but the person will only be in the new-made grave ; we may be carried to a lunatic asylum, hopelessly imprisoned with other mad people—but the person will only be in the new-made grave.

Something of this strange anomaly conveys itself to Mr. Hardy in the eccentric verse which I quote. The lonely watchman is asked why he stares at a grave with eyes that are heavy with sorrow. The answer is quite evidently unexpected.

> " ' Nay ; she was the woman I did not love,
> Whom all the others were ranked above,
> Whom during her life I thought nothing of.' "

Terrible truth stalks through these lines ; dreadful and heartrending narrative, for nothing can now be done to rectify the wrong.

. . . . . .

When a great shock strikes us, the only emotion we are really capable of is utter inability to realise what has actually happened. Upstairs in the big room, with the now drawn-down blinds, all that matters in our world has slipped away. Downstairs the chair in which our dearest had sat is empty—

but of course it won't be long before the chair is again filled with the sweet presence. In the gardens the flowers wait and look hungry. They are merely waiting to be once again stroked and petted by gentle hands. And yet up in the big room the gentle hands are folded across the breast and they will never more move unless other hands move them. It is all a dream that is a deadly nightmare.

This idea of the death of a loved one being only a dream and the stunning effect of a shock occasioning this delusion is wonderfully described in a verse that Mr. Hardy writes.

" ' It has lasted days, but minute and hour
I expect to get aroused
And find him as usual in the bower
Where we so happily housed.
Yet stays this nightmare too appalling,
And like a web shakes me,
And piteously I keep on calling
And no one wakes me ! ' "

Hardy could make us shiver if the woman was awakened ; her shrieks as she was led away to the house for the insane would force their way into our very souls and make us sick and full of deadly fear.

Sometimes Mr. Hardy's verse is quite free from any satire or gloomy philosophy. A soft and mellow richness then adorns it. The verse that I quote here is a lovely little piece of poetry, wistful yet resigned, unselfish and yet completely satisfied.

" And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree ;
For I shall not mind, slumbering peacefully."

Satire, cynicism are qualities of Mr. Hardy's verse. Beauty and grace are other qualities. And as a poet Mr. Hardy does not ask for much reward. He merely asks for this.

> " But soon or later, when you hear
> That he has doffed this wrinkled gear,
> Some evening at the first star ray,
> Come to his graveside, pause and say,
> ' Whatever the message his to tell,
> Two bright souled women loved him well ' ;
> Stand and say that amid the dim ;
> It will be praise enough for him."

It would probably be praise enough for any poet. Let the man go down to death without money—it matters not ; let him go down to the grave unsung by wailing crowds ; let his body mingle with the dust and the worms reap their long delayed reward, but let him not go down to the grave unloved. For love is eternal ; it cannot be overcome by mortality. The poetry of Mr. Hardy implies the sting of death, but if the question is asked—" Oh, grave, where is thy victory ? "—the answer may be that Mr. Hardy would really give is that the victory is not to the grave but to love.

END OF PART TWO

PART III
A SUMMING-UP

CHAPTER ONE

THE PHILOSOPHER

In dealing with the philosophy of a great writer we are quite often progressing along a very definite and evolutionary journey. We find quite often, if not an actual change in thought, if we compare a first book with a very late book, at least a development. In the case of Mr. Bernard Shaw there is a definite evolution of thought in his early works and in those which are much later. His standpoint in his later works is more tolerant than that discoverable in earlier books.

Mr. Hardy, in my opinion, adopts precisely the same standpoint to life in his early works as he does in his later volumes. All through his works his quarrel with life asserts itself. There is never the slightest indication that Mr. Hardy has any intention of growing out of his gloom. The dark clouds which obscure the sun in the days of his beginnings in literature are still there when Mr. Hardy is in the position of being classed among the great men of letters of the world.

In this chapter I hope to very briefly sum up what I have been endeavouring to arrive at all through this book. That is, What is the philosophy of the mind that has penned the books I have examined? I shall divide this chapter into two parts. In the first I propose to deal with the philosophy as expressed in the prose works; in the second I wish to consider the outlook expressed by Mr. Hardy when he writes poetry.

If we look very generally at the view of life expressed in the prose works of Mr. Hardy it must surely be apparent that the view is a very sombre one. The landscape is obscured by the heavy mist of doubt, the mortals who wander about this landscape appear to be governed by a cruel chance that gives them no option as to the direction of their wanderings.

It may as well be asked at once : Is Mr. Hardy a materialist ? It is excessively difficult to make any adequate reply to such a question. On the one hand he appears to have no fixed belief in any kind of spiritual compensation, yet he so often implies that there is some kind of governing power beyond and behind the material universe.

At the end of that marvellous book, " Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Mr. Hardy chides at the ruler of the universe for sporting with Tess. So far, so good. This is a kind of subtle materialism, for the fact that whatever power there is behind the universe is obviously of no utilitarian value. But—and this is where it seems to me Mr. Hardy is inclined to limit himself—he makes no sort of suggestion that Tess, when she has died, may find some compensation for her miseries beyond the grave. I am not arguing whether such a supposition as this is mischievous or good ; I am asserting that it has no place in Mr. Hardy's philosophy in his prose works.

At the same time again Mr. Hardy has a theology which is a perfectly futile one. That God or the power behind the world should be merely a kind of force treating the world as a joke for its own crude sports cannot but lead to the most dangerous and detestable pessimism.

In a sense Hardy is almost the maker of his own pessimism. Sometimes it is almost as if he thought about the Power behind the Universe first and then from this *a priori* assumption framed characters which would be treated in a manner

worthy of such a deplorable deity. But this is to suggest that the mind of Mr. Hardy is theological first, and that his fiction is the result. Let us go a step further. If a man believed in a perfectly good God—in the Fatherhood of God as defined by the Church—would he necessarily be offended by a book like " Tess of the D'Urbervilles." I mean—if " Tess " were a " true " story, would an orthodox believer be impelled to doubt the truth of his orthodoxy ? I do not think so, because such a believer would not consider Tess's life to be ended when she was hanged by the neck until she was dead. He would be impelled, rather, to believe in some kind of compensation of a metaphysical nature.

What, I think, Mr. Hardy's philosophy would be inclined to suggest would be the insoluble problem of cruelty. But whereas this cruelty problem drives Mr. Hardy to consider the Ruler of the Universe a monster out for sport ; out for making mortals his legitimate game, the more orthodox thinker would still be puzzled, but would demand that it was superficial to dogmatise about the nature of the Power behind the world because of *apparent* cruelty suffered by mortals.

Or we may take another standpoint. I have said above that it is possible that Mr. Hardy, having satisfied himself about the force that rules the world, creates characters which fall in line with his philosophical assumptions. There is another difficulty, that many of the Hardy characters (I exclude Tess) appear to really have themselves to blame. They are weak, vacillating, blown hither and thither. This leads up once again to the old and horrid problem of free will. Yet again Mr. Hardy seems to me to acquiesce in a kind of dualism. While some of his characters seem to have no will at all of their own, others appear to have plenty of will and plenty of opportunity of using it to their own dis-

advantage. Yet, and here is Mr. Hardy in a dilemma, these characters who have plenty of will seem somehow impelled to use that will to their own disadvantage.

It is of course true that the Mayor of Casterbridge was an out and out scoundrel, and that his end was miserable, and one at which we should weep with unashamed tears. Yet all the time we have the uneasy feeling that power exterior to himself thrust this Mayor down and down and down, until he could only cry out that no man miss him.

Then there is the most sad of all Mr. Hardy's sad books. Jude, the idealist, the seeker after God, the peasant boy longing to be a scholar, a priest. His very nature is a curse to him ; his relations with women pander to the weak side of his nature. If there is any character which Mr. Hardy writes of who so enlists our whole sympathy, it is poor Jude.

Jude, even more, I think, than Tess, seems (I use the word advisedly) to be cursed from birth. Mr. Hardy's philosophy of Jude is undoubtedly that he experiences cruelty. But here is the difficulty—does the Mayor of Casterbridge experience cruelty ? Of course he does, because surely Hardy implies, although he does not state it in so many words, that he is forced in some curious way to be bad.

Determinism is possibly the best word to use to describe the philosophy of Mr. Hardy. It is a standpoint that must lead to a certain amount of pessimism. But whether it need lead to the doctrine of despair so often to be found in Mr. Hardy's works is, I think, a matter that should not be dogmatised about. For, as I have said, in my opinion the weakness of Mr. Hardy is that he lets, in his prose works, his Determinism result in a very definite materialism.

If, on the other hand, his Determinism did not result in a materialism, would he be a Determinist at all ? That is, perhaps, to enter on an argument that does not really affect

the question. All I wish to suggest here is that perhaps Mr. Hardy defeats his own ends. On the one hand he *suggests* some kind of metaphysical power bullying mortals; at the same time he appears to make no suggestion that this power may have only hold over the mortal body. Of course, it could be argued that this is a good thing, because a Determinism that continued beyond the grave would be too horrible to contemplate. But for all that, a Determinism that only expresses itself in cruelty leads to despair if there is no kind of thought of a future rectification.

Mr. Hardy's philosophy, again, rather depends upon what we demand that life should give us. To all the Hardy characters misery comes sooner or later. If we demand that life shall provide us with happiness, then we shall obviously deplore the Hardy philosophy. But if we think that unhappiness and even despair are not evil, we may well acquiesce in the point of view of Mr. Hardy.

In his prose works Mr. Hardy is gloomy and full of the bitterness of life. He seems to moan that life is unfair, that life is governed and planned by some arbitrary power. No road leads to happiness or even the avoidance of unhappiness. Mr. Hardy promulgates a philosophy that can quite easily be the type of thought that leads to atheism. In his case his own philosophy appears to hurl him back again and again to Determinism.

There is nothing constructive in the least in his philosophy; he makes no attempt to suggest any way out. His prose work vibrates with sorrow; tears are spread over all; the world is dark.

Perhaps the essence of his philosophy, as expressed in his prose works, is the *apparent* helplessness of mankind. There is none to point the way. If it be asked is Mr. Hardy's philosophy a helpful one in any way, I am bound to say I

cannot see that it is. But that is not our business in this book. I have endeavoured to state what his point of view is in his prose works.

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In the poetry that he has written there is a good deal of philosophy that can be described as parallel to the point of view of Mr. Hardy's prose. On the whole the outlook is again sombre and gloomy, but there is an amused satirical vein which is not very apparent in the prose works.

It would be, I suppose, absurd to ask whether there is any philosophy in " The Dynasts." It does not seem reasonable to expect any philosophy in a great epic poem which in its very essence is narrative verse.

It is in the smaller poems that some kind of philosophy can be found. Perhaps the essence of it is a kind of " topsy turveyism "—disappointment appears to dog everybody. People are always in love with someone else.

There is, again, I think, a kind of vague Determinism running all through the poems. Yet Hardy in some ways is not so definitely materialistic as he is when he is writing prose. He expresses quite often a curious idea that is very akin to present day Spiritualism. He also dwells on the rather morbid idea that quite a lot of melancholy satisfaction can be derived from the contemplation of graves.

The irony of life strikes Mr. Hardy over and over again. Life does not play " quite straight." The poems denote this with the same insistence that the prose works do. Those in the poems seem to be ruled by a rather cruel and callous power.

In some of his poems Mr. Hardy is not quite so serious about life as he is in his other books. He can even be amused at some of the eventualities and incongruities that

stalk through it. There is not quite the same feeling of despair in some of the poems.

Yet it has to be conceded that, speaking generally, Mr. Hardy's view of life in his poems is much the same as he sees it through the medium of his prose. The same sense of human impotence is there. The same sense of drifting without guidance can be found.

I suppose the doctrine of Determinism is the backbone of the poems, but I do not find quite such a cold and despairing materialism as can be discovered in books like " Tess of the D'Urbervilles " and " Jude the Obscure." The general philosophy, though, is certainly one of gloom and disillusion, with certainly not much belief in a beneficent Power behind the order of things.

As a philosopher Mr. Hardy is interesting. His philosophy does not seem to me to lead to anything particularly tangible, nor does he give us any idea as to what the purpose of life may be. Instead he harps on the gloomy side of it and justifies that harping by a rather pathetic and sustained insistence on a callous Ruling Power.

The philosophy of Mr. Hardy is not, I think, at all useful. It may even be very dangerous ! At the same time, it may of course be true ! If it is, then we are of all men the most miserable, for we have not even hope. But it may be untrue. Then we are of all men the most happy, for we have not been deprived of hope.

True or untrue, real or imaginary, the philosophy as contained in the prose works and the poems of Mr. Hardy is sad and unsatisfying, and we are left with a sense of groping in thick darkness, with a very indefinite light in the distance, if there is any light at all.

CHAPTER TWO

HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE

At the present day Mr. Hardy holds a position of pre-eminence in the world of letters. His reputation as a novelist and poet is world wide. In a popular sense of the expression he is the " father of literature." In this chapter I wish to make an attempt to consider his place in literature and his claims to immortality.

From the standpoint of pure style Mr. Hardy is sure of a high place. His prose moves easily, his situations are free from exaggeration, while his powers of description are quite unrivalled among contemporary writers. Yet at times he is extremely simple in his methods of using the literary art. He has a habit—to him evidently a congenial one—of delving straight into an incident without any preliminary and often quite unnecessary play of words.

The prose books that Mr. Hardy has given to the world are an harmonious combination of a good story and a deep character study. Sometimes, in the acute analysis that he brings to bear upon the characters he is creating, Mr. Hardy is almost modern, but fortunately he avoids the vices and foibles of that unenviable state of existence.

Something of the difficulty of determining the place of Mr. Hardy in contemporary literature arises from the fact that he has chosen to write novels and write novels that are intricate treatises. Another difficulty is that Mr. Hardy is

also a poet who has written one terrific epic poem and many poems that have nearly all the merits of true poetry.

What we really have to ask is whether the fiction works that Mr. Hardy has produced have in them that which would secure for them—immortality. Again the question had better be still more narrowed. Is it the theme of the novels that would secure them permanence or is it the treatment of the theme? I think that both these questions could be answered in the affirmative. Mr. Hardy, rather like Dickens, deals with fundamental problems, and he deals with them in a manner which should be acceptable in any age. There appears to be no sort of reason why Tess should not enlist the sympathies of thousands of readers a hundred years hence. We cannot, even in these days of perpetual change, even in these days when Science shows us to be ever evolving, imagine that human nature will be so different, so unemotional, that it would feel no interest in Tess, feel no misery for her misfortunes. If Tess did not appeal, then we shall have developed into a race of Robots, and Mr. Hardy would have no right to expect to be remembered!

Mr. Hardy to-day is in the unique position of being a classical novelist. His name is spoken of with reverence by men of every shade of thought. It will probably be thought in many quarters that the consideration of the non-permanence of Mr. Hardy is too unlikely to need any serious thought. Those who think thus are entitled to their opinions. At the same time, there are few who would deny that literature produces the most surprising results. Neglect comes to those who might least expect it. A sudden awakened interest in a long dead author may set at nought all the prophecies that unwise critics have formulated.

I have already suggested that at any rate Mr. Hardy's book "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" may expect to be classed

among those volumes which are immortal. And surely there are few, if any, who would deny this beautiful book the right to such a happy fate. We must never allow a book that can move to unashamed tears, that can move to unselfish love, to go the way of all flesh. Though Tess died on the scaffold, she has produced her own immortality. Hardy may not believe in immortality, but his works are surely, at least in part, deathless.

There is then another book, an earlier book than " Tess " —a book of a studied villainy, a book of a dreadful failure. Is it that " The Mayor of Casterbridge " will achieve immortality ? Again, as in " Tess," Mr. Hardy deals with fundamentals, the conflict of cleverness, outstanding talents and their growth into inevitable evil.

The extraordinary downward path of the unfortunate Mayor is written with a sympathy and a brilliance that, apart from the philosophy behind it, should appeal to successive generations of lovers of great fiction.

There is, apart from their intrinsic worth, another consideration upon which I should defend the immortality demand that I make for Mr. Hardy. It is that humanity ever loves to dwell on the melancholy, it ever loves to bathe itself in its own spontaneous tears, it ever loves melancholy sorrow, because humanity is inherently kind and good-natured, and melancholy draws out these admirable emotions. Of all the melancholy books by melancholy contemporary writers, I believe that " Jude the Obscure " is not unlikely to occupy the first place. This brilliantly written book about a dead failure is reminiscent of the Life of Christ with Calvary a failure instead of a gigantic success. For while Christ was a success, when He was thought to be a failure, Jude was thought to be a failure and in every sense he was a failure. Yet there is a beauty about

this terrible book of a failure, for it is that beauty that is always present when a man or a woman try for an ideal, however miserably they may fail.

Sometimes I am inclined to the opinion that " Jude the Obscure " is the finest book that Mr. Hardy has written ; at other times Tess seems to push Jude out.

In present day literature sex is so much written of that we are inclined to delve back into the past in an attempt to escape the subject. Yet Mr. Hardy is essentially a sex writer. His books would find a certain place among the books written by our greatest novelists when these novelists were treating of sex. Yet Mr. Hardy is only a sex writer in so far as all real life is sex. What is there really in " Tess " which is not of sex ? What is there in " Jude " that is not of sex ? Surely so little that the essence of these two books is sex. But it is not the sex of modern superficial sex writers, but the sex of a grand vital passion, a passion transcending death, a passion contemptuous of death. The sex in " Jude " may be sordid and rather weak, but it goes hand in hand with vast emotion, though it has not, I think, the overwhelming love parallel that can be found in " Tess."

" The Mayor of Casterbridge " is, of course, in the strict sense not really a sex book, yet the beginnings of the life of that unhappy man are bound up with a sex mistake ; I mean an incongruous marriage.

There are, of course, several novels of Mr. Hardy concerning which it would be probably unwise to predict a very lasting appeal. Mr. Hardy does seem to be the writer of several really great books and a large number of those which are ordinary—and yet possibly great as well. The great ones are, I think, great and extraordinary !

Whether Mr. Hardy is a popular novelist in the accepted sense is really rather doubtful. His novels have one certain

quality which would make them unpopular with modern people; that is they are long. Their background is, of course, now rather out of date; topographically they are still safe and sound. Yet in spite of these possible defects permanence can be accorded to some of the works of fiction.

If Mr. Hardy can expect to find immortality as a poet, it will surely be achieved by one great poem; his classic and scholarly work, "The Dynasts." This historical drama may safely expect to be read in all ages by those who have any interest in the Napoleonic wars and have interest in poetry put to a great and lasting historical use. Mr. Hardy's more minor poems have probably that vein of impudent satire which will gain for them a rather unstable and vacillating permanence.

With no attempt at any ridiculous, and therefore superficial, dogmatism, I should predict a certain immortality for four of Mr. Hardy's works. For the others I would suggest that probably the novels will gradually be neglected and that the smaller poems will be neglected much less easily.

The four works that I venture to predict immortality for are "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," "The Mayor of Casterbridge" and "Jude the Obscure" in the prose of Mr. Hardy and "The Dynasts" in his poetry.

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Mr. Hardy is now a very old man. Down in the fair country of Dorsetshire he rests after having given his all to the grand and noble art of Literature. Mr. Hardy has not a cheerful view of life; he is a thinker who is absolutely unafraid to express his thinkings.

England has produced many men of letters whose fame has spread over the world like a pleasant and refreshing breeze. In Mr. Hardy she has given to the larger world a writer who

has made a world cry and a world think. In return the world has lavished upon Mr. Hardy a fame that comes to few of those who spend their lives in the making of Art.

Mr. Hardy's universe is full of black clouds, but we do well to realise the presence of thick clouds; not only because they cannot be ignored, but because they postulate a potential and inevitable time when the sun shall shine and disperse them.

Though Mr. Hardy does not point to the coming of the sun, blame should not be accorded to him. Melancholy is one of the choicest of the expressions of art, and in the hands of Mr. Hardy we are dealing with a master who has invested sorrow and melancholy with genius.

THE END